A MOTLEY

By

JOHN GALSWORTHY

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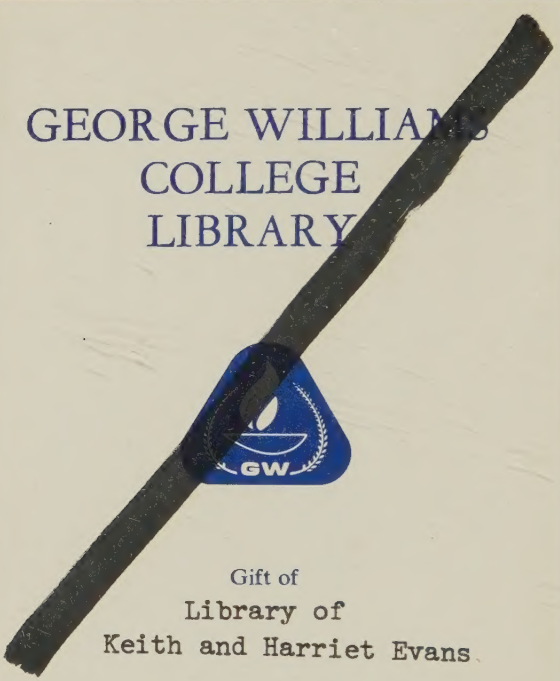

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A MOTLEY

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BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

NEW YORK
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TO
E. V. LUCAS

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE stories, studies, and impressions, which make up this volume, bear dates ranging from 1899 to 1910. "A Portrait" and "The Japanese Quince" appear for the first time. For permission to reprint others I thank the Editors of the *English Review*, *Englishwoman*, *Nation*, *Speaker*, *Outlook*, *Sketch*, *T.P.'s Weekly*, and *Westminster Gazette*.

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A MOTLEY

A PORTRAIT

IT is at the age of eighty that I picture him, without the vestige of a stoop, rather above middle height, of very well-proportioned figure, whose flatness of back and easy movements were the admiration of all who saw them. His iron-grey eyes had lost none of their colour, they were set-in deep, so that their upper lids were invisible, and had a peculiar questioning directness, apt to change suddenly into twinkles. His head was of fine shape—one did not suspect that it required a specially made hat, being a size larger than almost any other head; it was framed in very silky silvery hair, brushed in an arch across his forehead, and falling in becoming curves over the tips of his ears; and he wore always a full white beard and moustaches, which concealed a jaw and chin of great determination cleft by a dimple. His nose had been broken in his early boyhood; it was the nose of a thinker,

broad and of noticeable shape. The colour of his cheeks was a fine dry brown; his brow very capacious, both wide and high, and endowed with a singular serenity. But it was the balance and poise of his head which commanded so much attention. In a theatre, church, concert-hall, there was never any head so fine as his, for the silvery hair and beard lent to its massiveness a curious grace and delicacy.

The owner of that head could not but be endowed with force, sagacity, humour, and the sense of justice. It expressed, indeed, his essential quality—equanimity; for there were two men in him—he of the chin and jaw, a man of action and tenacity, and he of the nose and brow, the man of speculation and impersonality; yet these two were so curiously balanced and blended that there was no harsh ungraceful conflict. And what made this equanimity so memorable was the fact that both his power of action and his power of speculation were of high quality. He was not a commonplace person content with a little of both. He wanted and had wanted throughout life, if one may judge by records, a good

deal of both, ever demanding with one half of him strong and continuous action, and with the other half, high and clean thought and behaviour. The desire for the best both in material and spiritual things remained with him through life. He felt things deeply; and but for his strange balance, and a yearning for inward peace which never seems to have deserted him, his ship might well have gone down in tragedy.

To those who had watched that journey, his voyage through life seemed favourable, always on the top of the weather. He had worked hard, and he had played hard, but never too hard. And though one might often see him irritated, I think no one ever saw him bored. He perceived a joke quicker than most of us; he was never eccentric, yet fundamentally independent of other people's opinions, and perhaps a little unconscious that there were better men than he. Not that he was conceited, for of this quality, so closely allied to stupidity and humbug, he had about as much as the babe unborn. He was, indeed, a natural foe to anæmia in any of its forms, just as he

was instinctively hostile to gross bull-beef men and women. The words, "a bullying chap," were used by him as crushing dispraise. I can recall him now in his chair after dinner, listening to one, who, puffing his cigarette, is letting himself go on a stream of robustious, rather swaggering complacencies; with what a comprehending straight look he regards the speaker, not scornful, not sarcastic, but simply, as it were, saying: "No, my young buck, for all your fine full-blooded talk, and all your red face, you are what I see you to be, and you will do what I tell you to do!" Such men had no chance with him when it came to the tug of war; he laid his will on them as if they had been children.

He was that rather rare thing, a pure-blooded Englishman; having no strain of Scotch, Welsh, Irish, or foreign blood in his pedigree for four hundred years at least. He sprang from a long line of farmers intermarrying with their kind in the most southern corner of Devonshire, and it is probable that Norse and British blood were combined in him in a high state of equality. Even in the actual situation

of his place of origin, the principle of balance had been maintained, for the old farmhouse from which his grandfather had emerged had been perched close to the cliff. Thus, to the making of him had gone land and sea, the Norseman and the Celt.

Articled to the Law at the age of sixteen by his father, a Plymouth merchant, whose small ancient ships traded to the Mediterranean in fruits, leather, and wines, he had come to London, and at the earliest possible date (as was the habit with men in those times) had been entered on the rolls as a solicitor. Often has he told me of the dinner he gave in honour of that event. "I was a thread-paper, then," he would say (indeed, he never became fat),—"We began with a barrel of oysters." About that and other festivities of his youth, there was all the rich and rollicking flavour of the days of Pickwick. He was practically dependent on his own exertions from the time he began to practise his profession, and it was characteristic of him that he never seems to have been hard pressed for money. The inherent sanity and moderation of his instincts

preserved him, one imagines, from the financial ups and downs of most young men, for there was no niggardliness in him, and a certain breadth of conception characterised his money affairs throughout life. It was rather by the laws of gravity, therefore, whereby money judiciously employed attracts money, and the fact that he lived in that moneymaker's Golden Age, the nineteenth century, that he had long been (at the age of eighty) a wealthy man. Money was to him the symbol of a well-spent, well-ordered life, provocative of warmth in his heart because he loved his children, and was careful of them to a fault. He did not marry till he was forty-five, but his feeling for the future of his family manifested itself with the birth of his first child. Selecting a fair and high locality, not too far away from London, he set himself at once to make a country place, where the little things should have fresh air, new milk, and all the fruits of the earth, home-grown round them. Quite wonderful was the forethought he lavished on that house and little estate stretching down the side of a hill, with its walled gardens, pasture, corn-land and cop-

pice. All was solid, and of the best, from the low four-square red brick house with its concrete terrace and French windows, to the cow-houses down by the coppice. From the oak trees, hundreds of years old, on the lawns, to the peach trees just planted along the south sunny walls. But here too, there was no display for the sake of it, and no extravagance. Everything was at hand, from home-baked bread, to mushrooms wild and tame; from the stables with their squat clock-tower, to pigsties; from roses that won all the local prizes, to bluebells; but nothing redundant or pretentious.

The place was an endless pleasure to him, who to the last preserved his power of taking interest, not only in great, but in little things. Each small triumph over difficulty—the securing of hot water in such a quarter, the better lighting of another, the rescue of the nectarines from wasps, the quality of his Alderney cows, the encouragement of rooks—afforded him as much simple and sincere satisfaction as every little victory he achieved in his profession, or in the life of the Companies which

he directed. But with all his shrewd practical sense, and almost naïve pleasure in material advantage, he combined a very real spiritual life of his own. Nor was there anything ascetic in that inner life. It was mellow as the music of Mozart, his most beloved composer; Art and Nature, both had their part in it. He was, for instance, very fond of opera, but only when it could be called 'grand'; and it grieved him that opera was no longer what it had been, yet was it secretly a grave satisfaction that he had known those classical glories denied to the present generation. He loved indeed almost all classical music, but (besides Mozart) especially Beethoven, Gluck, and Meyerbeer, whom he insisted (no less than Herbert Spencer) on considering a great composer. Wagner he tried very hard to appreciate and, after visiting Bayreuth, even persuaded himself that he had succeeded, though he never ceased to point out the great difference that existed between this person and Mozart. He loved the Old Masters of painting, having for favourites amongst the Italians: Rafael, Correggio, Titian, Tintoretto; and amongst

Englishmen Reynolds and Romney. On the other hand, he regarded Hogarth and Rubens as coarse, but Vandyke he very much admired, because of his beautiful painting of hands, the hall-mark, he would maintain, of an artist's quality. I cannot remember his feeling about Rembrandt, but Turner he certainly distrusted as extravagant. Botticelli and the earlier masters he had not as yet quite learned to relish; and Impressionism, including Whistler, never really made conquest of his taste, though he always resolutely kept his mind open to what was modern—feeling himself young at heart.

Once on a spring day, getting over a stile, I remember him saying:

"Eighty! I can't believe it. Seems very queer. I don't feel it. Eighty!" And, pointing to a blackbird that was singing, he added: "That takes the years off you!" His love of Nature was very intimate, simple, and unconscious. I can see him standing by the pond of a summer evening watching the great flocks of starlings that visited those fields; or, with his head a little to one side, listening rapturously to a skylark. He would contem-

plate, too, with a sort of serene passion, sunset effects, and every kind of view.

But his greatest joy in life had been his long summer holidays, in Italy or among the Alps, and his memory was a perfect storehouse of peaks, passes, and arrivals at Italian inns. He had been a great walker, and, as an old man, was still very active. I can remember him on horseback at the age of sixty, though he had never been a sportsman—not being in the way of hunting, having insufficient patience for fishing, and preferring to spend such time as he might have had for shooting, in communing with his beloved mountains. His love for all kinds of beauty, indeed, was strangely potent; and perhaps the more natural and deep for its innocence of all tradition and formal culture. He got it, I think, from his mother, of whom he always spoke with reverence as "the most beautiful woman in the Three Towns." Yes, his love of beauty was a sensuous, warm glow pervading the whole of him, secretly separating him from the majority of his associates. A pretty face, a beautiful figure, a mellow tune, the sight of dancing, a blackbird's song,

the moon behind a poplar tree, starry nights, sweet scents, and the language of Shakespeare —all these moved him deeply, the more perhaps because he had never learned to express his feelings. His attempts at literature indeed were strangely naïve and stilted; his verse, in the comic vein, rather good; but all, as it were, like his period, ashamed to express any intimate feeling except in classical language. Yet his literary tastes were catholic; Milton was his favourite poet, Byron he also admired; Browning he did not care for; his favourite novelist was George Eliot, and, curiously enough—in later life—Turgenev. I well remember when the translated volumes of that author were coming out, how he would ask for another of those yellow books. He did not know why he liked them, with all those "crack-jaw" Russian names; but assuredly it was because they were written by one who worshipped beauty.

The works of Dickens and Thackeray he read with appreciation, on the whole, finding the first perhaps a little too grotesque, and the second a little too satiric. Scott, Trollope,

Marryat, Blackmore, Hardy, and Mark Twain also pleased him; but Meredith he thought too "misty."

A great theatre-goer all his life, he was very lukewarm towards modern actors, comparing them adversely with those constellations of the past, Edmund and Charles Kean, Charlie Mathews, Farren, Power, "little Robson," and Helen Faucit. He was, however, a great lover of Kate Vaughan's dancing; an illustration of the equanimity of one who had formed his taste on Taglioni.

Irving he would only accept in *Louis XI.*, *The Bells*, and, I think, *Charles I.*, and for his mannerisms he had a great aversion. There was something of the old grand manner about his theatre habits. He attended with the very best and thinnest lavender kid gloves on his hands, which he would hold up rather high and clap together at the end of an act which pleased him; even, on memorable occasions, adding the word "Bravo." He never went out before the end of a play, however vehemently he might call it "poor stuff," which, to be quite honest, he did about nine times out

of ten. And he was ever ready to try again, having a sort of touching confidence in an art which had betrayed him so often. His opera hats were notable, usually of such age as to have lost shape, and surely the largest in London. Indeed, his dress was less varied than that of any man I have ever seen; but always neat and well-cut, for he went habitually to the best shops, and without eccentricity of any kind. He carried a repeating gold watch and thin round gold chain which passed, smooth and sinuous as a little snake, through a small black seal with a bird on it; and he never abandoned very well made side-spring boots with cork soles, greatly resenting the way other boots dirtied his hands, which were thin and brown with long polished nails, and blue veins outstanding. For reading only, he wore tortoise-shell eyeglasses, which he would perch low down on the bridge of his nose, so that he could look over them, for his eyes were very long-sighted. He was extremely fastidious in his linen, and all personal matters, yet impatient of being mollycoddled, or in any way over-valeted. Even on the finest days, he

carried an umbrella, the ferrule of which, from his habit of stumping it on the pavement, had a worn and harassed look, and was rarely more than half present.

Having been a Conservative Liberal in politics till well past sixty, it was not until Disraeli's time that he became a Liberal Conservative. This was curious, for he always spoke doubtfully of "Dizzy," and even breathed the word "humbug" in connection with him. Probably he was offended by what he termed "the extravagance" in Dizzy's rival. For the Duke of Devonshire and Lord Salisbury he had respect without enthusiasm; and conceived for John Bright a great admiration as soon as he was dead. But on the whole the politician who had most attracted him had been Palmerston, because—if memory serves—he had in such admirable degree the faculty of "astonishing their weak nerves." For, though never a Jingo, and in later days both cautious and sane in his Imperialism, he had all a Briton's essential deep-rooted distrust of the foreigner. He felt that they were not quite safe, not quite sound, and must from time to

time be made to feel this. Born two years after the battle of Waterloo, he had inherited a certain high pride of island birth. And yet in one case, where he was for years in close contact with a foreigner he conceived for him so grave a respect, that it was quite amusing to watch the discomfiture of his traditional distrust. It was often a matter of wonder amongst those who knew him that a man of his ability and judgment had never even sought to make his mark in public affairs. Of the several reasons for this, the chief was, undoubtedly, the extraordinary balance of his temperament. To attain pre-eminence in any definite department of life would have warped and stunted too many of his instincts, removed too many of his interests; and so he never specialised in anything. He was quite unambitious, always taking the lead in whatever field he happened to be, by virtue of his great capacity and willpower, but never pushing himself, and apparently without any life-aim, but that of leading a sane, moderate, and harmonious existence.

And it is for this that he remains written on the national page, as the type of a lost and

golden time, when life to each man seemed worth living for its own sake, without thought of its meaning as a whole, or much speculation as to its end. There was something classical, measured, and mellow in his march adown the years, as if he had been god-mothered by Harmony. And yet, though he said his prayers and went to church, he could not fairly have been called a religious man; for at the time when he formed his religious habits, "religion" had as yet received no shocks, and reigned triumphant over an unconscious nation whose spirit was sleeping; and when "religion," disturbed to its foundations, began to die, and people all round him were just becoming religious enough to renounce the beliefs they no longer held, he was too old to change, and continued to employ the mechanism of a creed which had never really been vital to him. He was in essence pagan: All was right with his world! His love was absorbed by Nature, and his wonder by the Great Starry Scheme he felt all around. This was God to him; for it was ever in the presence of the stars that he was most moved to a sense of divine order. Look-

ing up at those tremulous cold companions he seemed more reverent, and awed, than ever he was in the face of creeds or his fellow man. Whether stirred by the sheer beauty of Night, or by its dark immensity swarming with those glittering worlds, he would stand silent, and then, perhaps, say wistfully: "What little bits of things we are! Poor little wretches!" Yes, it was then that he really worshipped, adoring the great wonders of Eternity. No one ever heard him talk with conviction of a future life. He was far too self-reliant to accept what he was told, save by his own inner voice; and that did not speak to him with certainty. In fact, as he grew old, to be uncertain of all such high things was part of his real religion; it seemed to him, I think, impertinent to pretend to intimate knowledge of what was so much bigger than himself. But neither his conventional creed, nor that awed uncertainty which was his real religion were ever out of hand; they jogged smoothly on in double harness, driven and guided by a supremer power—his reverence for Life. He abhorred fanaticism. In this he truly mirrored

the spirit of that great peacefully expanding river, the Victorian Era, which began when he came of age. And yet, in speaking before him of deep or abstract things, it was not safe to reckon without his criticism, which would sometimes make powerfully shrewd deductions out of the sheer logical insight of a nature neither fundamentally concerned with other worlds, nor brought up to the ways of discussion. He was pre-eminently the son of a time between two ages—a past age of old, unquestioning faith in Authority; a future age of new faith, already born but not yet grown. Still sheltering in the shade of the old tree which was severed at the roots and toppling, he never, I think, clearly saw—though he may have had glimpses—that men, like children whose mother has departed from their home, were slowly being forced to trust in, and be good to, themselves and to one another, and so to form out of their necessity, desperately, unconsciously, their new great belief in Humanity. Yes, he was the son of *a time between two ages*—the product of an era without real faith—an individualist to the core.

His attitude towards the poor, for instance, was essentially that of man to man. Save that he could not tolerate impostors, (one of his favourite words), and saw through them with almost startling rapidity, he was compassionate to any who had fallen on evil fortune, and especially to those who had been in any way connected with him. But in these almonary transactions he was always particularly secretive, as if rather doubting their sagacity, and the wisdom of allowing them to become known—himself making up and despatching the parcels of old clothes, and rather surreptitiously producing such coins and writing such cheques as were necessary. But "the poor," in bulk, were always to him the concern of the Poor Law pure and simple, and in no sense of the individual citizen. It was the same with malefactors, he might pity as well as condemn them, but the idea that the society to which he and they belonged was in any way responsible for them, would never have occurred to him. His sense of justice, like that of his period, was fundamentally based on the notion that every man had started with

equal, or at all events, with quite sufficient opportunities, and must be judged as if he had. But, indeed, it was not the custom in his day to concern oneself with problems outside one's own class. Within that class, and in all matters domestic, no man was ever born with a nicer sense of justice. It was never overridden by his affections; very seldom, and that with a certain charming *naiveté*, by his interests. This sense of justice, however, in no way prevented him from being loved; for, in spite of a temper apt to take fire, flare up, and quickly die down again, he was one of the most loveable of men. There was not an ounce of dourness or asperity in his composition. His laughter was of a most infectious kind, singularly spontaneous and delightful, resembling the laughter of a child. The change which a joke wrought in the aspect of his large, dignified, and rather noble face, was disconcerting. It became wrinkled, or, as it were, crumpled; and such a twinkling overcame his eyes as was frequently only to be extinguished by moisture. "That's rich!" was his favourite expression to describe what had tickled him;

for he had preserved the use of Devonshire expressions, bringing them forth, from an intimate pet drawer of memory, and lingering over them with real gusto. He still loved, too, such Devonshire dishes of his boyhood, as "junket" and "toad in the hole"; and one of his favourite memories was that of the meals snatched at the old coaching Inn at Exeter, while they changed the horses of the Plymouth to the London coach. Twenty-four hours at ten miles an hour, without even a break! Glorious drive! Glorious the joints of beef, the cherry brandy! Glorious the old stage coachman, a "monstrous fat chap" who at that time ruled the road!

In the City, where his office was situate, he was wont, though at all times a very moderate eater, to frequent substantial, old-fashioned hostelries such as Roche's, Pim's, or Birch's, in preference to newer and more pretentious places of refreshment. He had a remarkable palate too, and though he drank very little, was, in his prime, considered as fine a judge of wine as any in London. Of tea he was particularly fond, and always consumed the very

best Indian, made with extreme care, maintaining that the Chinese variety was only fit for persons of no taste.

He had little liking for his profession, believing it to be beneath him, and that Heaven had intended him for an advocate; in which he was probably right, for his masterful acumen could not have failed to assure him a foremost position at the Bar. And in him, I think, it is certain that a great Judge was lost to the State. Despite this contempt for what he called the "pettifogging" character of his occupation, he always inspired profound respect in his clients; and among the shareholders of his Companies, of which he directed several, his integrity and judgment stood so high that he was enabled to pursue successfully a line of policy often too comprehensive, and far-seeing for the temper of the times. The reposeful dignity, and courage, of his head and figure when facing an awkward General Meeting could hardly have been exceeded. He sat, as it were, remote from its gusty temper, quietly determining its course.

Truly memorable were his conflicts with the

only other man of his calibre on those Boards, and I cannot remember that he was ever beaten. He was at once the quicker tempered and more cautious. And if he had not the other's stoicism and iron nerve, he saw further into the matter in hand, was more unremitting in his effort, equally tenacious of purpose, and more magnetic. In fact, he had a way with him.

But, after all said, it was in his dealings with children that the best and sweetest side of his personality was manifested. With them he became completely tender, inexhaustibly interested in their interests, absurdly patient, and as careful as a mother. No child ever resisted him, or even dreamed of doing so. From the first moment they loved his white hair and beard, his "feathers" as one little thing called them. They liked the touch of his thin hand, which was never wet or cold; and, holding to it, were always ready to walk with him—wandering with complete unanimity, not knowing quite where or for what reason. How often have I not watched him starting out on that high adventure with his grandson, his face turned gravely down tow-

ards a smaller face turned not quite so gravely up; and heard their voices tremendously concerned with all the things they might be going to do together! How often have I not seen them coming back, tired as cats, but still concerned about what was next going to happen! And children were always willing to play cricket with him because he bowled to them very slowly, pitching up what he called "three-quarter" balls, and himself always getting "out" almost before he went in. For, though he became in his later years a great connoisseur of cricket, spending many days at Lord's or the Oval, choosing our play of the very highest class, and quite impatient of the Eton and Harrow Match, he still performed in a somewhat rococo fashion, as of a man taught in the late twenties of the last century, and having occasion to revive that knowledge about 1895. He bent his back knee, and played with a perfectly crooked bat, to the end that when he did hit the ball, which was not too often, it invariably climbed the air. There was, too, about his batting, a certain vein of recklessness or bravado, somewhat out of keeping with his

general character, so that, as has been said, he was never in too long. And when he got out he would pitch the bat down as if he were annoyed, which would hugely please his grandson, showing of course that he had been trying his very best, as indeed, he generally had. But his bowling was extremely impressive, being effected with very bent knees, and a general air of first putting the ball to the eye, as if he were playing bowls; in this way he would go on and on giving the boy "an innings," and getting much too hot. In fielding he never could remember on the spur of the moment whether it was his knees or his feet that he ought to close; and this, in combination with a habit of bending rather cautiously, because he was liable to lumbago, detracted somewhat from his brilliance; but when the ball was once in his hands, it was most exciting —impossible to tell whether he would throw it at the running batsman, the wicket, or the bowler, according as the game appeared to him at the moment to be double wicket, single wicket, or rounders. He had lived in days when games were not the be-all and end-all

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of existence, and had never acquired a proper seriousness in such matters. Those who passed from cricket with him to cricket in the cold wide world found a change for which at first they were unable to account. But even more fascinating to children than his way of playing cricket was his perfect identification with whatever might be the matter in hand. The examination of a shell, the listening to the voice of the sea imprisoned in it, the making of a cocked hat out of the *Times* newspaper, the doing up of little buttons, the feeding of pigeons with crumbs, the holding fast of a tiny leg while walking beside a pony, all these things absorbed him completely, so that no visible trace was left of the man whose judgment on affairs was admirable and profound. Nor, whatever the provocation, could he ever bring himself to point the moral of anything to a child, having that utter toleration of their foibles which only comes from a natural and perfectly unconscious love of being with them. His face, habitually tranquil, wore in their presence a mellow look of almost devil-may-care serenity.

Their sayings, too, he treasured, as though they were pearls. First poems, such as:

> I sorr a worm,
> It was half-ly dead;
> I took a great spud
> And speared through his head

were to him of singular fair promise. Their diagnoses of character, moreover, especially after visiting a circus, filled him with pure rapture, and he would frequently repeat this one:

"Father, is Uncle a clever man?"

"H'm! well—yes, certainly."

"I never seen no specimens. He can't balance a pole on his nose, for instance."

To the declining benison of their prayers, from their "darling father and mother," to "all poor people who are in distress," he loved to listen, not so much for the sentiments expressed, as because, in their little nightgowns, they looked so sweet, and were so round-about in their way of getting to work.

Yes, children were of all living things his chosen friends, and they knew it.

But in his long life he made singularly few fast friendships with grown-up people, and, as far as I know, no enemies. For there was in him, despite his geniality, a very strong vein of fastidiousness, and such essential deep love of domination, that he found, perhaps, few men of his own age and standing to whom he did not feel natively superior. His most real and lifelong friendship was for a certain very big man with a profound hatred of humbug and a streak of "the desperate character" in him. They held each other in the highest esteem, or, as they would probably have put it, swore by one another; the one grumbling at, but reverencing, the other's high and resolute equanimity; the other deploring and admiring the one's deep and generous recklessness. The expressions: "Just like John, the careful fellow!" "Just like Sil, reckless beggar!" were always on their lips; for like all their generation they were sparing of encomium; and great, indeed, must have been their emotion before they would show their feelings. Dear as they were to each other's hearts, they never talked together of spiritual things, they never spoke

in generalities, but gravely smoking their cigars, discussed their acquaintances, investments, wine, their nephews and grandchildren; and the affairs of the State—condemning the advertising fashion in which everything was now done. Once in a way they would tell a story—but they knew each other's stories too well; once in a way quote a line of Byron, Shakespeare, or Milton; or whistle to each other, inharmoniously, a bar or two from some song that Grisi, Mario, or Jenny Lind had sung. Once in a way memories of the heyday of their youth, those far-off golden hours, stealing over them, they would sit silent, with their grave steady eyes following the little rings of bluish smoke. . . . Yes, for all their lack of demonstration, they loved each other well.

I seem still to see the subject of this portrait standing at his friend's funeral one bleak November day, the pale autumn sunlight falling on the silver of his uncovered head a little bowed, and on his grave face, for once so sad. I hear the tones of his voice, still full and steady; and from the soul in his eyes, looking, as it were, through and through those forms of death

to some deep conclusion of his own, I know how big and sane and sweet he was.

His breed is dying now, it has nearly gone. But as I remember him with that great quiet forehead, with his tenderness, and his glance which travelled to the heart of what it rested on, I despair of seeing his like again. For, with him there seems to me to have passed away a principle, a golden rule of life, nay, more, a spirit—the soul of Balance. It has stolen away, as in the early morning the stars steal out of the sky. *He* knew its tranquil secret, and where he is, there must it still be hovering.

1910.

A FISHER OF MEN

LONG ago it is, now, that I used to see him issue from the rectory, followed by his dogs, an Irish and a fox terrier. He would cross to the churchyard, and, at the gate, stand looking over the Cornish upland of his cure of souls, toward the sea, distant nearly a mile. About his black thin figure there was one bright spot, a little gold cross, dangling on his vest. His eyes at such moments were like the eyes of fishermen watching from the cliffs for pilchards to come by; but as this fisher of men marked the grey roofs covered with yellow lichen where his human fishes dwelt, red stains would come into his meagre cheeks. His lips would move, and he would turn abruptly in at the gate over which was written: "This is the Gate of Heaven."

A certain green spot within that churchyard was kept clear of grave-stones, which thickly covered all the rest of the ground.

He never—I believe—failed to look at it, and think: "I will keep that corner free. I will not be buried amongst men who refuse their God!"

For this was his misfortune, which, like a creeping fate, had come on him year by year throughout his twenty years of rectorship. It had eaten into his heart, as is the way with troubles which a man cannot understand. In plain words, his catch of souls had dwindled season by season till, from three hundred when he was first presented to the living, it barely numbered forty. Sunday after Sunday he had conducted his three services. Twice a week from the old pulpit, scanning through the church twilight that ever scantier flock of faces, he had in his dry, spasmodic voice—whose harsh tones, no doubt, were music to himself—pronounced this conduct blessed, and that accursed, in accordance with his creed. Week after week he had told us all the sinfulness of not attending God's House, of not observing the Lord's Day. He had respected every proper ritual and ceremony; never refusing baptism even to the illegitimate, nor burial

to any but such as took their own lives; joining in marriage with a certain exceptional alacrity those whose conduct had caused scandal in the village. His face had been set, too, against irreverence; no one, I remember, might come to his church in flannel trousers.

Yet his flock had slowly diminished! Living, unmarried, in the neglected rectory, with his dogs, an old housekeeper, and a canary, he seemed to have no interests, such as shooting, or fishing, to take him away from his parish duties; he asked nothing better than to enter the houses and lives of his parishioners; and as he passed their doors—spare, black, and clean-shaven—he could often be seen to stop, make, as it were, a minatory gesture, and walk on with his hungry eyes fixed straight before him. Year by year, to encourage them, he printed privately and distributed documents containing phrases such as these: "It were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." "But the fearful and unbelieving shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." When he wrote them, his

eyes—I fancy—flared, as though watching such penalties in process of infliction. Had not his parishioners in justice merited those fates?

If, in his walks, he came across a truant, some fisherman or farmer, he would always stop, with his eyes fastened on the culprit's face:

"You don't come to church now; how's that?"

Like true Cornishmen, hoping to avoid unpleasantness, they would offer some polite excuse: They didn't knaw ezactly, zur—the missus 'ad been ailin'; there was always somethin'—like—that! This temporising with the devil never failed to make the rector's eyes blaze, or to elicit from him a short dry laugh: "You don't know what you're saying, man! You must be mad to think you can save your soul that way! This is a Christian country!"

Yet never after one of these encounters did he see the face of that parishioner in his church again. "Let un wait!" they would murmur, "tidden likely we'm gwine to his church t'be spoke to like dogs!"

But, indeed, had they been dogs, the rector

would not have spoken to them like that. To dogs his conduct was invariably gentle. He might be seen sometimes beside a field of standing corn, where the heads of his two terriers could be marked spasmodically emerging above the golden stalks, as they hunted a covey of partridges or brood of young pheasants which they had scented. His harsh voice could be heard calling them: "Jim, Jim! Pat, Pat! To heel, you rascals!" But when they came out, their tongues lolling ecstatically, he only stooped and shook his finger at them, and they would lick his hand, or rub themselves against his trousers, confident that he would never strike them. With every animal, with every bird and insect he was like this, so gentle that they trusted him completely. He could often be surprised sitting on a high slate stile, or standing in a dip of the wide road between banks of gorse and bramble, with his head, in its wide hat, rather to one side, while a bullfinch or hedge-sparrow on a branch, not three feet off, would be telling him its little tale. Before going for a walk he would sweep his field-glass over the pale-gold landscape of corn-

field, scorched pasturage and sand-dune, to see if any horse seemed needing water, or sheep were lying on its back. He was an avowed enemy, too, of traps and gins, and whenever he met with one, took pains to ensure its catching nothing. Such consistent tenderness to dumb animals was perhaps due to a desire to take their side against farmers who would not come to church; but more, I think, to the feeling that the poor things had no souls, that they were here to-day and gone to-morrow—they could not be saved and must be treated with compassion, unlike those men with immortal spirits entrusted by God specially to his care, for whose wanton disobedience no punishment, perhaps, could be too harsh. It was as if, by endowing him with Her authority over other men, the Church had divided him into two.

For the view he took of life was very simple, undisturbed by any sense of irony, unspoiled by curiosity, or desire to link effect with cause, or indeed, to admit the necessity of cause at all. At some fixed date God had made the earth of matter; this matter He had divided into the inanimate and the animate, unconnected with

each other; animate matter He had again divided into men, and animals; in men He had placed souls, making them in His own image. Men again He had divided into the Church and other men; and for the government and improvement of these other men God had passed Himself into His Church. That Church again had passed herself into her ministers. Thus, on the Church's minister—placed by Providence beyond the fear of being in the wrong—there had been enjoined the bounden duty of instructing, ruling, and saving at all costs, the souls of men.

This was why, I think, when he encountered in the simple folk committed to his charge a strange dumb democratic spirit, a wayward feeling that the Universe was indivisible, that power had not devolved, but had evolved, that things were relative, not absolute, and so forth —expressed in their simple way, he had experienced from the first a gnawing irritation which, like a worm, seemed to have cankered his heart. Gradually one had seen this canker stealing out into his face and body, into his eyes and voice, into the very gestures of his

lean arms and hands. His whole form gave the impression of a dark tree withered and eaten by some desiccating wind, like the stiff oaks of his Cornish upland, gnarled and riven by the Atlantic gales.

Night and day in the worn old rectory, with its red conservatory, he must have brooded over the wrong done him by his people, in depriving him of his just due, the power to save their souls. It was as though an officer, gagged and bound at the head of his company, should have been forced to watch them manœuvring without him. He was like a school-master tied to his desk amongst the pandemonium of his scholars. His failure was a fact strange and intolerable to him, inexplicable, tragic—a fact mured up in the mystery which each man's blindness to the nature of his own spirit wraps round his relations with his fellow beings. He could not doubt that, bereaved by their own wilful conduct of his ministrations, of the Church in fact, and, through the Church, of God, his parishioners were given up to damnation. If they were thus given up to damnation, he, their proper pastor—their rightful

leader, the symbol of the Church, that is of God—was but a barren, withered thing. This thought he could not bear. Unable to see himself as others saw him, he searched to find excuses for them. He found none; for he knew that he had preached no narrow doctrines cursed with the bigotry which he recognised in the Romish or Nonconformist faiths. The doctrines and dogmas he was appointed to administer were of the due and necessary breadth, no more, no less. He was scrupulous, even against his own personal feeling, to observe the letter of the encyclicals. Thus, nothing in the matter of his teaching could account for the gradual defection of his flock. Nor in the manner of it could he detect anything that seemed to himself unjustified. Yet, as the tide ebbed from the base of the grey cliffs, so, without haste, with deadly certainty, the tide ebbed from his church. What could he, then, believe but that his parishioners meant to be personally offensive to himself?

In the school-house, at the post office, on the green, at choir practice, or on the way to service, wherever he met them, one could see

that he was perpetually detecting small slights or incivilities. He had come, I think, almost to imagine that these people, who never came to church, fixed the hours of their births and deaths and marriages maliciously, that they might mock at the inconvenience caused to one who neither could, nor would, refuse to do his duty. It was blasphemy they were committing. In avoiding God's church, yet requiring such services of His minister, they were making God their servant.

One could find him any evening in his study, his chin resting on his hand, the oil-lamp flaring slightly, his dogs curled up beside him, and the cloth cover drawn over the cage of his canary so that the little creature should not suffer from the light. Almost the first words he spoke would show how ceaselessly he brooded. "Nothing," he would say, "ever prospers in this village; I've started this and that! Look at the football club, look at the Bible class—all no good! With people such as these, wanting in all reverence, humility, and love of discipline! You have not had the dealings with them that I have!"

In truth his dealings with them had become notorious throughout the district. A petition, privately subscribed, and presented to the bishop for his removal had, of course, met with failure. A rector could not be removed from his living for any reason—it had been purchased for him by his father. Nor could his position as minister be interfered with on any such excuse as that of the mere personal dislike of his parishioners—as well, indeed, seek by petition to remove the Church herself. The knowledge of his unassailable position found expression among his parishioners in dogged looks, and the words: "Well, we don' trouble!"

It was in the twentieth year of his rectorship that a slight collision with the parish council drew from him this letter: "It is my duty to record my intention to attend no more meetings, for I cannot, as a Christian, continue to meet those who obstinately refuse to come to church."

It was then late September, and the harvest festival had been appointed for the following Sunday. The week passed, but the farmers

had provided no offerings for the decoration of the church; the fishermen too, accustomed by an old tradition in that parish to supply some purchased fruit in lieu of their shining fishes, sent nothing. The boycott had obviously been preconcerted.

But when the rector stepped that Sunday into the pulpit the church was fuller than it had been for many years. Men and women who had long ceased to attend, had come, possessed evidently by an itch to see how "th' old man" would take it. The eyes of the farmers and fishermen, hardened by the elements, had in them a grim humorous curiosity, such as one may remark in the eyes of a ring of men round some poor wretch, whom, moved by a crude sense of justice, they have baited into the loss of dignity. Their faces, with hardly an exception, seemed to say: "Sir, we were given neither hand nor voice in the choosing of you. From the first day you showed us the cloven hoof. We have never wanted you. If we must have you, let us at all events get some sport out of you!"

The rector's white figure rising from the dark

pulpit received without movement the shafts of all our glances; his own deep-set hungering eyes were fixed on the Bible in his hand. He gave out his text: "The kindly fruits of the earth, in due season——"

His voice—strangely smooth and low that morning, I remember—began discoursing of the beneficence and kindliness of God, who had allowed the earth to provide men year by year with food, according to their needs. It was as though the mellow sentiment of that season of fruition had fallen on his exiled spirit. But presently he paused, and leaning forward, looked man by man, woman by woman, at us all. Those eyes now had in them the peculiar flare which we knew so well. His voice rose again: "And how have you met this benefaction, my brethren, how have you shown your gratitude to God, embodied in His Church and in me, Her appointed representative? Do you think, then, that God will let you insult Him with impunity? Do you think in your foolish pride that God will suffer you unpunished to place this conspired slight on Him? If you imagine this, you are woefully

mistaken. I know the depths of your rebellious hearts; I read them like this Book. You seek, you have always sought, to set my authority at defiance—a wayward and disobedient generation. But let me tell you: God, who has set His Holy Church over you, is a just and strong God; as a kind master chastises his dogs for their own good, so will He chastise you. You have sought to drive me out from among you—" and from his pale twisting lips, through the hush, there came a sound like a laugh—"to drive the Church, to drive God Himself, away! You could not have made a grosser error. Do you think that we, in solemn charge of your salvation, are to be moved by such puerile rebellion? Not so! God has appointed us, to God alone we are accountable. Not if every man and woman in the parish, aye, and every child, deserted this church, would I recoil one step from my duty, or resign my charge! As well imagine, forsooth, that your great Church is some poor man-elected leader, subject to your whims, and to be deposed as the fancy takes you! Do you conceive the nature of the

Church and of my office to be so mean and petty that I am to feed you with the food you wish me to feed you with, to lead you into such fields as you dictate? No! my brethren, you have not that power! Is the shepherd elected by the sheep? Listen then to the truth, or to your peril be it! The Church is a rock set up by God amongst the shifting sands of life. It comes from Heaven, not from this miserable earth. Its mission is to command, yours to obey. If the last man in this Christian country proved a rebel and a traitor, the Church and her ministers would stand immovable, as I stand here, firm in my sacred resolve to save your souls. Go down on your knees, and beg God to forgive you for the wanton insult you have offered Him! . . . Hymn 266: 'Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom!' "

Through the grey aisles, where so great a silence reigned, the notes of the organ rose. The first verse of that hymn was sung only by the choir and a few women's voices; then one by one the men joined in. Our voices swelled into a shout louder than we had ever heard in the little church before—a mutinous, harsh,

roaring sound, as though, in the words of that gentle hymn, each one of this grim congregation were pouring out all the resentment in his heart. The roar emerging through the open door must have startled the passing tourists, and the geese in the neighbouring farmyard. It ended with a groan like the long-drawn sob of a wave sucking back.

In the village all the next week little except this sermon was discussed. Farmers and fishermen are men of the world. The conditions of their lives, which are guarded only by their own unremitting efforts, which are backed by no authority save their own courage in the long struggle with land and sea, gives them a certain deep philosophy. Amongst the fishermen there was one white-bearded old fellow who even seemed to see a deep significance in the rector's sermon. "'Mun putts hissel' above us, like the Czar o' Roossia," he said, " 'tes the sperrit o' the thing that's wrong. Talk o' lovin' kindness, there's none 'bout the Church, 'sfar's I can see, 'tes all: 'Du this, or ye'll be blasted!' This man—he's a regular chip o' the old block!" He spoke, indeed, as though

the rector's attitude towards them were a symbol of the Church's attitude to men. Among the farmers such analogies were veiled by the expression of simpler thoughts:

"Yu med tak' a 'arse to the watter, yu can't mak' un drink!"

"Whu wants mun, savin' our souls! Let mun save's own!"

"We'm not gude enough to listen to his prachin', I rackon!"

It was before a congregation consisting of his clerk, two tourists, three old women, one of them stone deaf, and four little girls, that the unfortunate man stood next Sunday morning.

Late that same wild and windy afternoon a jeering rumour spread down in the village: "Th' old man's up to Tresellyn 'Igh Cliff, talkin' to the watters!"

A crowd soon gathered, eager for the least sensation that should break monotony. Beyond the combe, above the grey roofs of the fishing village, Tresellyn High Cliff rises abruptly. At the top, on the very edge, the tiny black shape of a man could be seen standing

with his arms raised above his head. Now he kneeled, then stood motionless for many minutes with hands outstretched; while behind him, the white and brown specks of his two terriers were visible, couched along the short grass. Suddenly he could be seen gesticulating wildly, and the speck shapes of the dogs leaping up, and cowering again as if terrified at their master's conduct.

For two hours this fantastic show was witnessed by the villagers with gloating gravity. The general verdict was: "'Th' old man's carryin' on praaperly." But very gradually the sight of that tiny black figure appealing to his God—the God of his Church militant which lived by domination—roused the superstition of men who themselves were living in primitive conflict with the elements. They could not but appreciate what was so in keeping with the vengeful spirit of a fighting race. One could see that they even began to be afraid. Then a great burst of rain, sweeping from the sea, smothered all sight of him.

Early next morning the news spread that the rector had been found in his arm-chair,

the two dogs at his feet, and the canary perched on his dead hand. His clothes were unchanged and wet, as if he had sunk into that chair, and passed away, from sheer exhaustion. The body of "the poor unfortunate gentleman"—the old housekeeper told me—was huddled and shrunk together; his chin rested on the little gold cross dangling on his vest.

They buried him in that green spot, apart from his parishioners, which he had selected for his grave, placing on the tombstone these words:

HIC JACET

P——— W———

PASTOR ECCLESIÆ BRITANNICÆ

"GOD IS LOVE"

1908.

THE PRISONER

ON a fine day of early summer in a London garden, before the birds had lost their Spring song, or the trees dropped their last blossoms, our friend said suddenly:

"Why! there's a goldfinch!" Blackbirds there were, and thrushes, and tits in plenty, an owl at night, and a Christopher Columbus of a cuckoo, who solemnly, once a year, mistook this green island of trees for the main lands of Kent and Surrey, but a goldfinch—never!

"I hear it—over there!" he said again, and, getting up, he walked towards the house.

When he came back, our friend sat down again, and observed:

"I didn't know that you kept a cage-bird!" We admitted that our cook had a canary.

"A mule!" he remarked, very shortly.

Some strong feeling had evidently been aroused in him that neither of us could understand.

Suddenly he burst out:

"I can't bear things in cages; animals, birds, or men. I hate to see or think of them." And looking at us angrily, as though we had taken an advantage in drawing from him this confession, he went on quickly:

"I was staying in a German town some years ago, with a friend who was making inquiries into social matters. He asked me one day to go over a prison with him. I had never seen one, then, and I agreed. It was just such a day as this—a perfectly clear sky, and there was that cool, dancing sparkle on everything that you only see in some parts of Germany. This prison, which stood in the middle of the town, was one of those shaped like a star, that have been built over there on the plan of Pentonville. The system, they told us, was the same that you might have seen working here many years ago. The Germans were then, and still, no doubt, are, infatuated with the idea of muring their prisoners up in complete solitude. But it was a new toy to them then, and they were enjoying it with that sort of fanatical thoroughness which the Germans give to every-

thing they take up. I don't want to describe this prison, or what we saw in it; as far as an institution run on such dreadful lines can be, it was, I daresay, well-managed; the Governor, at all events, impressed me favourably. I'll simply tell you of the one thing which I shall never forget, because it symbolised to me for ever the caging of all creatures, animal or human, great or small."

Our friend paused; then, with an added irritation in his voice, as though aware of doing violence to his natural reserve, he went on:

"We had been all over the grizzly place when the Governor asked my friend whether he would like to see one or two of the 'life' prisoners.

" 'I will show you one,' he said, 'who has been here twenty-seven years. He is, you will understand'—I remember his very words—'a little worn by his long confinement.' While we were going towards this prisoner's cell, they told us his story. He had been a cabinet-maker's assistant, and when still quite a boy, joined a gang of burglars to rob his own employer. Surprised during the robbery, he had

blindly struck out, and killed his employer on the spot. He was sentenced to death, but, on the intervention of some Royalty who had been upset by the sight of corpses, I believe at the battle of Sadowa, his sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life.

"When we entered his cell he was standing perfectly still, gazing at his work. He looked quite sixty, though he could not have been more than forty-six—a bent, trembling ruin of a figure, covered by a drab-coloured apron. His face had the mealy hue and texture of all prisoners' faces. He seemed to have no features; his cheeks were hollow; his eyes large, but, looking back, I can't remember their colour—if, indeed, they had colour in them at all. As we passed in, one by one, through the iron door, he took off his round cap, drab-coloured too, like everything about him, showing his dusty, nearly bald head, with a few short grey hairs on end, and stood in an attitude of 'attention,' humbly staring at us. He was like an owl surprised by daylight. Have you ever seen a little child ill for the first time—full of bewilderment at its own suf-

fering? His face was like that, but so extraordinarily gentle! We had seen many of the prisoners, and he was the only one that had that awful *gentleness.* The sound of his voice, too: *'Ja, Herr Direktor—nein, Herr Direktor!'* soft and despairing—I remember it now—there was not a breath of will-power left." Our friend paused, frowning in his effort to re-create the scene. "He held in his hand," he went on presently, "a sheet of stiff paper, on which he had been transcribing the New Testament in letters from a code of writing for the deaf and dumb. When he passed his thin fingers over the type to show us how easily the deaf and dumb could read it, you could see that his hands were dusty like a miller's. There was nothing in the cell to produce that dust, and in my belief it was not dust on his hands, but some excretion from that human plant running to seed. When he held the sheet of paper up, too, it trembled like the wing of an insect. One of us asked, who invented the system he was working at, mentioning some name. *'Nein, nein,'* he said, and he stood shivering with eagerness to recollect

the right name. At last he drooped his head, and mumbled out: *'Ah, Herr Direktor, ich kann nicht!'* Then all of a sudden the name came bursting from his lips. At that moment, for the first time, he actually looked like a man. I never before then realised the value of freedom; the real meaning of our relations with other human beings; the necessity for the mind's being burnished from minute to minute by sights and sounds, by the need for remembering and using what we remember. This fellow, you see, had no use for memory in his life; he was like a plant placed where no dew can possibly fall on it. To watch that look pass over his face at the mere remembrance of a name was like catching sight of a tiny scrap of green leaf left in the heart of a withered shrub. Man, I tell you, is wonderful—the most enduring creature that has ever been produced!" Our friend rose, and began pacing up and down. "His world was not a large one; about fourteen feet by eight. He'd lived in it for twenty-seven years, without a mouse even for a friend. They do things thoroughly in prisons. Think of the tremendous vital force that must go to

the making of the human organism, for a man to live through that. . . . What do you imagine," he went on, turning to us suddenly, "kept even a remnant of his reason alive?—Well, I'll tell you: While we were still looking at his 'deaf and dumb' writing, he suddenly handed us a piece of wood about the size of a large photograph. It was the picture of a young girl, seated in the very centre of a garden, with bright-coloured flowers in her hand; in the background was a narrow, twisting stream with some rushes, and a queer bird, rather like a raven, standing on the bank. And by the side of the girl a tree with large hanging fruits, strangely symmetrical, unlike any tree that ever grew, yet with something in it that is in all trees, a look as if they had spirits, and were the friends of man. The girl was staring straight at us with perfectly round, blue eyes, and the flowers she held in her hand seemed also to stare at us. The whole picture, it appeared to me, was full of—what shall I say?—a kind of wonder. It had all the crude colour and drawing of an early Italian painting, the same look of difficulty

conquered by sheer devotion. One of us asked him if he had learnt to draw before his imprisonment; but the poor fellow misunderstood the question. "*Nein, nein,*" he said, "the Herr Direktor knows I had no model. It is a fancy picture!" And the smile he gave us would have made a devil weep! He had put into that picture all that his soul longed for—woman, flowers, birds, trees, blue sky, running water; and all the wonder of his spirit that he was cut off from them. He had been at work on it, they said, for eighteen years, destroying and repeating, until he had produced this, the hundredth version. It was a masterpiece. Yes, there he had been for twenty-seven years, condemned for life to this living death—without scent, sight, hearing, or touch of any natural object, without even the memory of them, evolving from his starved soul this vision of a young girl with eyes full of wonder, and flowers in her hand. It's the greatest triumph of the human spirit, and the greatest testimony to the power of Art that I have ever seen."

Our friend uttered a short laugh: "So

thick-skinned, however, is a man's mind that I didn't even then grasp the agony of that man's life. But I did later. I happened to see his eyes as he was trying to answer some question of the Governor's about his health. To my dying day I shall never forget them. They were incarnate tragedy—all those eternities of solitude and silence he had lived through, all the eternities he had still to live through before they buried him in the graveyard outside, were staring out of them. They had more sheer pitiful misery in them than all the eyes put together of all the free men I've ever seen. I couldn't stand the sight of them, and hurried out of the cell. I felt then, and ever since, what they say the Russians feel —for all their lapses into savagery—the sacredness of suffering. I felt that we ought all of us to have bowed down before him; that I, though I was free and righteous, was a charlatan and sinner in the face of that living crucifixion. Whatever crime he had committed—I don't care what it was—that poor lost creature had been so sinned against that I was as dirt beneath his feet. When I think of him—there

still, for all I know—I feel a sort of frenzy rising in me against my own kind. I feel the miserable aching of all the caged creatures in the world."

Our friend turned his head away, and for quite a minute did not speak. "On our way back, I remember," he said at last, "we drove through the Stadt Park. There, it was free and light enough; every kind of tree—limes, copper beeches, oaks, sycamores, poplars, birches, and apple trees in blossom, were giving out their scent; every branch and leaf was glistening with happiness. The place was full of birds, the symbols of freedom, fluttering about, singing their loudest in the sun. Yes, it was all enchanted ground. And I well remember thinking that in the whole range of Nature only men and spiders torture other creatures in that long-drawn-out kind of way; and only men do it in cold blood to their own species. So far as I know that's a fact of natural history; and I can tell you that to see, once for all, as I did, in that man's eyes, its unutterable misery, is never to feel the same towards your own kind again. That night I

sat in a *café* window, listening to the music, the talk, the laughter, watching the people pass in the street—shop-folk, soldiers, merchants, officials, priests, beggars, aristocrats, women of pleasure, and the light streaming out from the windows, and the leaves just moving against the most wonderful, dark blue sky. But I saw and heard nothing of it all. I only saw the gentle, mealy-coloured face of that poor fellow, his eyes, and his dusty, trembling hands, and I saw the picture that he had painted there in hell. I've seen it ever since, whenever I see or hear of any sort of solitary caged creature."

Our friend ceased speaking, and very soon after he rose, excused himself, and went away.

1909.

COURAGE

AT that time (said Ferrand) I was in poverty. Not the kind of poverty that goes without dinner, but the sort that goes without breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and exists as it can on bread and tobacco. I lived in one of those fourpenny lodging-houses, Westminster way. Three, five, seven beds in a room; if you pay regularly, you keep your own bed; if not, they put some one else there who will certainly leave you a memento of himself. It's not the foreigners' quarter; they are nearly all English, and drunkards. Three-quarters of them don't eat—can't; they have no capacity for solid food. They drink and drink. They're not worth wasting your money on—cab-runners, newspaper-boys, sellers of laces, and what you call sandwichmen; three-fourths of them brutalised beyond the power of recovery. What can you expect? They just live to scrape enough together to keep

their souls in their bodies; they have no time or strength to think of anything but that. They come back at night and fall asleep—and how dead that sleep is! No, they never eat—just a bit of bread; the rest is drink!

There used to come to that house a little Frenchman, with a yellow, crow's-footed face; not old either, about thirty. But his life had been hard—no one comes to these houses if life is soft; especially no Frenchman; a Frenchman hates to leave his country. He came to shave us—charged a penny; most of us forgot to pay him, so that in all he shaved about three for a penny. He went to others of these houses—this gave him his income—he kept the little shop next door, too, but he never sold anything. How he worked! He also went to one of your Public Institutions; this was not so profitable, for there he was paid a penny for ten shaves. He used to say to me, moving his tired fingers like little yellow sticks: "Pff! I slave! To gain a penny, friend, I'm spending fourpence. What would you have? One must nourish oneself to have the strength to shave ten people for a penny."

He was like an ant, running round and round in his little hole, without any chance but just to live; and always in hopes of saving enough to take him back to France, and set him up there. We had a liking for each other. He was the only one, in fact—except a sandwich-man who had been an actor, and was very intelligent, when he wasn't drunk—the only one in all that warren who had ideas. He was fond of pleasure and loved his music-hall—must have gone at least twice a year, and was always talking of it. He had little knowledge of its joys, it's true—hadn't the money for that, but his intentions were good. He used to keep me till the last, and shave me slowly.

"This rests me," he would say. It was amusement for me, too, for I had got into the habit of going for days without opening my lips. It's only a man here and there one can talk with; the rest only laugh; you seem to them a fool, a freak—something that should be put into a cage or tied by the leg.

"Yes," the little man would say, "when I came here first I thought I should soon go back, but now I'm not so sure. I'm losing my

illusions. Money has wings, but it's not to *me* it flies. Believe me, friend, I am shaving my soul into these specimens. And how unhappy they are, poor creatures; how they must suffer! Drink! you say. Yes, that saves them—they get a little happiness from that. Unfortunately, I haven't the constitution for it—here." And he would show me where he had no constitution. "You, too, comrade, you don't seem to be in luck; but then, you're young. Ah, well, *faut être philosophe*—but imagine what kind of a game it is in this climate, especially if you come from the South!"

When I went away, which was as soon as I had nothing left to pawn, he gave me money—there's no question of lending in those houses: if a man parts with money he *gives* it; and lucky if he's not robbed into the bargain. There are fellows there who watch for a new pair of shoes, or a good overcoat, profit by their wakefulness as soon as the other is asleep, and promptly disappear. There's no morality in the face of destitution—it needs a man of iron, and these are men of straw. But one thing

I will say of the low English—they are not bloodthirsty, like the low French and Italians.

Well, I got a job as fireman on a steamer, made a tour tramping, and six months later I was back again. The first morning I saw the Frenchman. It was shaving-day; he was more like an ant than ever, working away with all his legs and arms; a little yellower, and perhaps more wrinkled.

"Ah!" he called out to me in French, "there you are—back again. I knew you'd come. Wait till I've finished with this specimen—I've a lot to talk about."

We went into the kitchen, a big stone-floored room, with tables for eating—and sat down by the fire. It was January, but, summer or winter, there's always a fire burning in that kitchen.

"So," he said, "you have come back? No luck? Eh! Patience! A few more days won't kill you at your age. What fogs, though! You see, I'm still here, but my comrade, Pigon, is dead. You remember him—the big man with black hair who had the shop down the street. Amiable fellow, good friend to

me; and married. Fine woman his wife—a little ripe, seeing she has had children, but of good family. He died suddenly of heart disease. Wait a bit; I'll tell you about that. . . .

"It was not long after you went away, one fine day in October, when I had just finished with these specimens here, and was taking my coffee in the shop, and thinking of that poor Pigon—dead then just three days—when *pom!* comes a knock, and there is Madame Pigon! Very calm—a woman of good family, well brought up, well made—fine woman. But the cheeks pale, and the eyes so red, poor soul.

" 'Well, Madame,' I asked her, 'what can I do for you?'

"It seems this poor Pigon died bankrupt; there was not a cent in the shop. He was two days in his grave, and the bailiffs in already.

" 'Ah, Monsieur!' she says to me, 'what am I to do?'

" 'Wait a bit, Madame!' I get my hat and go back to the shop with her.

"What a scene! Two bailiffs, who would have been the better for a shave, sitting in a

shop before the basins; and everywhere, *ma foi*, everywhere, children! Tk! Tk! A little girl of ten, very like her mother; two little boys with little trousers, and one with nothing but a chemise; and others—two, quite small, all rolling on the floor; and what a horrible noise!—all crying, all but the little girl, fit to break themselves in two. The bailiffs seemed perplexed. It was enough to make one weep! Seven! and some quite small! That poor Pigon, I had no idea!

"The bailiffs behaved very well.

" 'Well,' said the biggest, 'you can have four-and-twenty hours to find this money; my mate can camp out here in the shop—we don't want to be hard on you!'

"I helped Madame to soothe the children.

" 'If I had the money,' I said, 'it should be at your service, Madame—in each well-born heart there should exist humanity; but I have no money. Try and think whether you have no friends to help you.'

" 'Monsieur,' she answered, 'I have none. Have I had time to make friends—I, with seven children?'

" 'But in France, Madame?'

" 'None, Monsieur. I have quarrelled with my family; and reflect—it is now seven years since we came to England, and then only because no one would help us.' That seemed to me bad, but what could I do? I could only say——

" 'Hope always, Madame—trust in me!'

"I went away. All day long I thought how calm she was—magnificent! And I kept saying to myself: 'Come, tap your head! tap your head! Something must be done!' But nothing came.

"The next morning it was my day to go to that sacred Institution, and I started off still thinking what on earth could be done for the poor woman; it was as if the little ones had got hold of my legs and were dragging at me. I arrived late, and, to make up time, I shaved them as I have never shaved them; a hot morning—I perspired! Ten for a penny! Ten for a penny! I thought of that, and of the poor woman. At last I finished and sat down. I thought to myself: 'It's too strong! Why do you do it? It's stupid! You are wasting

yourself!' And then, my idea came to me! I asked for the manager.

" 'Monsieur,' I said, 'it is impossible for me to come here again.'

" 'What do you mean?' says he.

" 'I have had enough of your—"ten for a penny"—I am going to get married; I can't afford to come here any longer. I lose too much flesh for the money.'

" 'What?' he says, ' you're a lucky man if you can afford to throw away your money like this!'

" 'Throw away my money! Pardon, Monsieur, but look at me'—I was still very hot —'for every penny I make I lose threepence, not counting the boot leather to and fro. While I was still a bachelor, Monsieur, it was my own affair—I could afford these extravagances; but now—it must finish—I have the honour, Monsieur!'

"I left him, and walked away. I went to the Pigons' shop. The bailiff was still there—Pfui! He must have been smoking all the time.

" 'I can't give them much longer,' he said to me.

" 'It is of no importance,' I replied; and I knocked, and went in to the back room.

"The children were playing in the corner, that little girl, a heart of gold, watching them like a mother; and Madame at the table with a pair of old black gloves on her hands. My friend, I have never seen such a face—calm, but so pale, so frightfully discouraged, so overwhelmed. One would say she was waiting for her death. It was bad, it was bad—with the winter coming on!

" 'Good morning, Madame,' I said. 'What news? Have you been able to arrange anything?'

" 'No, Monsieur. And you?'

" 'No!' And I looked at her again—a fine woman; ah! a fine woman.

" 'But,' I said, 'an idea has come to me this morning. Now, what would you say if I asked you to marry me? It might possibly be better than nothing.'

"She regarded me with her black eyes, and answered—

" 'But willingly, Monsieur!' and then, comrade, but not till then, she cried."

The little Frenchman stopped, and stared at me hard.

"H'm!" I said at last, "you have courage!"

He looked at me again; his eyes were troubled, as if I had paid him a bad compliment.

"You think so?" he said at last, and I saw that the thought was gnawing at him, as if I had turned the light on some desperate, dark feeling in his heart.

"Yes!" he said, taking his time, while his good yellow face wrinkled and wrinkled, and each wrinkle seemed to darken: "I was afraid of it even when I did it. Seven children!" Once more he looked at me: "And since!—sometimes—sometimes—I could—" he broke off, then burst out again:

"Life is hard! What would you have? I knew her husband. Could I leave her to the streets?"

1904.

THE MEETING

WALKING one day in Kensington Gardens, I strolled into the enclosure of the tea kiosque and sat down on the side sheltered from the east, where fashionable people never go.

The new-fledged leaves were swinging in a breeze that kept stealing up in puffs under the half-bare branches; sparrows and pigeons hunted on the grass for crumbs; and all the biscuit-coloured chairs and little round-topped marble tripods, with thick inverted cups and solitary bowls of sugar, were sending out their somewhat bleak invitation. A few of these tables were occupied; at one sat a pale, thin child in an enormous white hat, in the company of a cheery little red-cross nurse and a lady in grey, whose pathetic, half-thankful eyes betokened a struggling convalescence; at another, two ladies—Americans, perhaps—with pleasant, keen, brown faces, were munching

rolls; at a third, an old square man, bald and grey, sat smoking. At short intervals, like the very heart's cry of that Spring day, came the scream of the peacocks from across the water.

Presently there strolled along the gravel space from right to left a young man in a fashionable cut-away coat, shining top-hat, and patent boots, swinging a cane. His face was fresh and high-coloured, with little twisted dark moustaches, and bold, bright eyes. He walked like an athlete, whose legs and loins are hard with muscle; and he looked about him with exaggerated nonchalance. But under his swagger I detected expectation, anxiety, defiance. He re-passed, evidently looking for some one, and I lost sight of him.

But presently he came back, and this time he had *her* with him. Oh! She was a pretty soul, with her veil, and her flower-like face behind it, and her quick glances to left and right; and her little put-on air of perfect ease, of perfect—how shall we call it?—justification. And yet behind all this, too, was a subtle mixture of feelings—of dainty dis-

pleasure at her own position, of unholy satisfaction, of desire not to be caught. And he? How changed! His eyes, no longer bold and uneasy, were full of humble delight, of deferential worship; his look of animal nonchalance was gone.

Choosing a table not far from mine, which had, as it were, a certain strategic value, he drew her chair back for her, and down they sat. I could not hear their talk, but I could watch them, and knew as well as if they had told me in so many words that this was their first stolen meeting. That first meeting, *which must not be seen*, or rather the first meeting that both *felt* must not be seen—a very different thing. They had stepped in their own minds over the unmarked boundary of convention. It was a moment that had perhaps been months in coming, the preliminary moment that in each love affair comes only once, and makes all the after poignancy so easy.

Their eyes told the whole story—hers restlessly watchful of all around, with sudden clingings to his; and his, with their attempt at composure, and obvious devotion. And it was

psychologically amusing to see the difference between the woman and the man. In the midst of the stolen joy she had her eye on the world, instinctively deferring to its opinion, owning, so to speak, that she was in the wrong; while he was only concerned with striving not to lower himself in his own estimation by looking ridiculous. His deference to the world's opinion had gone by the board, now that he was looking into her eyes.

"D—n the world!" he said to himself; while she, still watching the world as a cat watches some bullying dog, knew she need not trouble about looking ridiculous—she would never look that. And when their eyes met, and could not for a moment tear themselves apart, it gave one an ache in the heart, the ache that the cry of the peacock brings, or the first Spring scent of the sycamores.

And I began wondering. The inevitable life of their love, just flowering like the trees, the inevitable life with its budding, and blossom, and decay, started up before me. Were they those exceptional people that falsify all expectation and prove the rule? Not they!

They were just the pair of lovers, the man and woman, clean, and vigorous, and young, with the Spring in their blood—fresh-run, as they say of the salmon, and as certain to drift back to the sea at the appointed time. On that couple bending their heads together, morals and prophecies were as little likely to take effect as a sleet shower on the inevitable march of Spring.

I thought of what was in store—for him, the hours of waiting, with his heart in his mouth, tortured by not knowing whether she would come, or why she did not come. And for her the hours of doubt: "Does he really love me? He cannot really love me!" The stolen meetings, whose rapture has gone almost as soon as come, in thought of the parting; the partings themselves—the tearing asunder of eyes, the terrible blank emptiness in the heart; and the beginning of waiting again. And then for her, the surreptitious terrors and delights of the "post," that one particular delivery agreed on for safety; the excuses for going out, for secrecy, for solitude. And for him, the journeys past the house after dark to see the

lights in the windows, to judge from them what was going on; and the cold perspirations, and furies of jealousy and terror; the hours of hard walking to drive away the fit; the hours of sleepless desire.

And then the hour, the inevitable hour of some stolen day on the river, or under the sheltering cover of a wood; and that face of hers on the journey home, and his offer to commit suicide, to relieve her of his presence; and the hard-wrung promise to meet once more. And the next meeting, the countless procession of meetings. The fierce delights, the utter lassitudes—and always like the ground bass of an accompaniment, the endless subterfuge. And then—the slow gradual process of cooling—the beginning of excuses, the perpetual weaving of self-justification; the solemn and logical self-apologies; the finding of flaws in each other, humiliating oaths and protestations; and finally the day when she did not come, or he did not come. And then—the letters; the sudden *rapprochement,* and the still more sudden—end.

It all came before the mind, like the scenes

of a cinematograph; but beneath the table I saw their hands steal together, and solemn prophetic visions vanished. Wisdom, and knowledge, and the rest, what were they all to that caress!

So, getting up, I left them there, and walked away under the chestnut trees, with the cry of the peacock following.

1904.

THE PACK

"IT'S only," said H., "when men run in packs that they lose their sense of decency. At least that's my experience. Individual man—I'm not speaking of savages—is more given to generosity than meanness, rarely brutal, inclines in fact to be a gentleman. It's when you add three or four more to him that his sense of decency, his sense of personal responsibility, his private standards, go by the board. I am not at all sure that he does not become the victim of a certain infectious fever. Something physical takes place, I fancy . . . I happen to be a trustee, with three others, and we do a deal of cheeseparing in the year, which as private individuals we should never dream of."

"That's hardly a fair example," said D., "but on the whole, I quite agree. Single man is not an angel, collective man is a bit of a brute."

The discussion was carried on for several minutes, and then P., who had not yet spoken, said: "They say a pinch of illustration is worth a pound of argument. When I was at the 'Varsity there was a man at the same college with me called Chalkcroft, the son of a high ecclesiastic, a perfectly harmless, well-mannered individual, who had the misfortune to be a Radical, or, as some even thought, a Socialist—anyway, he wore a turn-down collar, a green tie, took part in Union debates on the shady side, and no part in college festivities. He was, in fact, a "smug"— a man, as you know, who, through some accident of his early environment, incomprehensibly fails to adopt the proper view of life. He was never drunk, not even pleasantly, played no games connected with a ball, was believed to be afraid of a horse or a woman, took his exercise in long walks with a man from another college, or solitarily in a skiff upon the river; he also read books, and was prepared to discuss abstract propositions. Thus, in one way or another he disgusted almost every self-respecting under-graduate. Don't imagine, of course, that

his case was unusual; we had many such at M—— in my time; but about this Chalkcroft there was an unjustifiable composure, a quiet sarcasm, which made him conspicuously intolerable. He was thought to be a "bit above himself," or, rather, he did not seem conscious, as any proper "smug" should, that he was a bit below his fellows; on the contrary, his figure, which was slim, and slightly stooping, passed in and about college with serene assurance; his pale face with its traces of reprehensible whisker, wore a faint smile above his detested green tie; besides, he showed no signs of that poverty which is, of course, some justification to "smugs" for their lack of conformity. And as a matter of fact, he was *not* poor, but had some of the best rooms in college, which was ever a remembered grievance against him. For these reasons, then," went on P., "it was decided one evening to bring him to trial. This salutary custom had originated in the mind of a third year man named Jefferies, a dark person with a kind of elephant-like unwieldiness in his nose and walk, a biting, witty tongue, and very small eyes with a lecherous

expression. He is now a Scottish baronet. This gentleman in his cups had quite a pretty malice, and a sense of the dignity of the law. Wandering of a night in the quadrangles, he never had any difficulty in gathering a troop of fellows in search of distraction, or animated by public and other spirits; and, with them whooping and crowing at his heels, it was his beneficial practice to enter the rooms of any person, who for good and sufficient reasons merited trial, and thereupon to conduct the same with all the ceremony due to the dispensation of British justice. I had attended one of these trials before, on a chuckle-headed youth whose buffoonery was really offensive. The ceremony was funny enough, nor did the youth seem to mind, grinning from ear to ear, and ejaculating continually, 'Oh! I say, Jefferies!'

"The occasion of which I am going to speak now was a different sort of affair altogether. We found the man Chalkcroft at home, reading before his fire by the light of three candles. The room was panelled in black oak, and the yellow candle flames barely lit up the darkness as we came whooping in.

" 'Chalkcroft,' said Jefferies, 'we are going to try you.' Chalkcroft stood up and looked at us. He was in a Norfolk jacket, with his customary green tie, and his face was pale.

"He answered: 'Yes, Jefferies? You forgot to knock.'

"Jefferies put out his finger and thumb and delicately plucked Chalkcroft's tie from out of his waistcoat.

" 'You wear a green tie, sir,' he said.

"Chalkcroft went the colour of the ashes in the grate; then, slowly, a white-hot glow came into his cheeks.

" 'Don't look at me, sir,' said Jefferies; 'look at the jury!' and he waved his hand at us. 'We are going to try you for—' He specified an incident of a scabrous character which served as the charge on all such humorous occasions, and was likely to be peculiarly offensive to 'smugs' who are usually, as you know, what is called 'pi.'

"We yelped, guffawed, and settled ourselves in chairs; Jefferies perched himself on a table and slowly swung his thin legs; he always wore very tight trousers. His little black eyes

gleamed greedily above his unwieldy nose. Chalkcroft remained standing.

"It was then," pursued P., "that I had my first qualm. The fellow was so still and pale and unmoved; he looked at me, and, when I tried to stare back, his eyes passed me over, quiet and contemptuous. And I remember thinking: 'Why are we all here—we are not a bit the kind of men to do this sort of thing?' And really we were not. With the exception of Jefferies, who was, no doubt, at times inhabited by a devil, and one Anderson, a little man in a long coat, with a red nose and very long arms, always half-drunk—a sort of desperate character, and long since, of course, a schoolmaster—there wasn't one of us, who, left to himself, would have entered another man's rooms unbidden (however unpopular he might be, however much of a 'smug'), and insulted him to his face. There was Beal, a very fair, rather good-looking man, with bowed legs and no expression to speak of, known as Boshy Beal; Dunsdale, a heavy, long-faced, freckled person, prominent in every college disturbance, but with a reputation for respectability; Hor-

den (called Jos), a big, clean-cut Kentish man with nice eyes, and fists like hammers; Stickland, fussy, with mild habits; Sevenoax, now in the House of Lords; little Holingbroke, the cox; and my old schoolfellow, Fosdyke, whose dignity even then would certainly have forbidden his presence had he not previously dined. Thus, as you see, we were all or nearly all from the 'best' schools in the country, in the 'best' set at M——, and naturally, as individuals, quite—oh! quite—incapable of an ungentlemanlike act.

"Jefferies appointed Anderson gaoler, Dunsdale Public Prosecutor, no one counsel for the defence, the rest of us jury, himself judge, and opened the trial. He was, as I have said, a witty young man, and, dangling his legs, fastening his malevolent black eyes on Chalkcroft, he usurped the functions of us all. The nature of the charge precludes me from recounting to you the details of the trial, and, in fact, I have forgotten them, but as if he were standing here before us, I remember, in the dim glow of those three candles, Chalkcroft's pale, unmoved, ironic face; his unvarying, 'Yes, Jefferies';

his one remonstrance: 'Are you a gentleman, Jefferies?' and our insane laughter at the answer: 'No, sir, a by-our-Lady judge.' As if he were standing here before us I remember the expression on his face at the question: 'Prisoner, are you guilty—yes or no?' the long pause, the slow, sarcastic: 'As you like, Jefferies.' As if he were standing here before us I remember his calm and his contempt. He was sentenced to drink a tumbler of his own port without stopping; whether the sentence was carried out I cannot tell you; for with one or two more I slipped away.

"The next morning I had such a sense of discomfort that I could not rest till I had sent Chalkcroft a letter of apology. I caught sight of him in the afternoon walking across the quad. with his usual pale assurance, and in the evening I received his answer. It contained, at the end, this sentence: 'I feel sure you would not have come if it hadn't been for the others.' It has occurred to me since that he may have said the same thing to us all—for anything I know, we may all of us have written."

There was a silence. Then H. said: "The Pack! Ah! What second-hand devil is it that gets into us when we run in packs?"

1905.

COMPENSATION

IF, as you say (said Ferrand), there is compensation in this life for everything, do tell me where it comes in here.

Two years ago I was interpreter to an hotel in Ostend, and spent many hours on the Plage waiting for the steamers to bring sheep to my slaughter. There was a young man about, that year, who had a stall of cheap jewellery; I don't know his name, for among us he was called Tchuk-Tchuk; but I knew *him*—for we interpreters know everybody. He came from Southern Italy and called himself an Italian, but by birth he was probably an Algerian Jew; an intelligent boy, who knew that, except in England, it is far from profitable to be a Jew in these days. After seeing his nose and his beautiful head of frizzy hair, however, there was little more to be said on the subject. His clothes had been given him by an English tourist—a pair of flannel trousers, an old

frock coat, a bowler hat. Incongruous? Yes, but think, how cheap! The only thing that looked natural to him was his tie; he had unsewn the ends and wore it without a collar. He was little and thin, which was not surprising, for all he ate a day was half a pound of bread, or its equivalent in macaroni, with a little piece of cheese, and on a feast day a bit of sausage. In those clothes, which were made for a fat man, he had the appearance of a scarecrow with a fine, large head. These "Italians" are the Chinese of the West. The conditions of life down there being impossible, they are driven out like locusts or the old inhabitants of Central Asia—a regular invasion. In every country they have a kind of Society which helps them to make a start. When once provided with organs, jewellery, or whatever their profession, they live on nothing, drink nothing, spend no money. Smoke? Yes, they smoke; but you have to give them the tobacco. Sometimes they bring their women; more often they come alone—they make money more quickly without. The end they have in view is to scrape together a treasure of two or three

hundred pounds and go back to Italy rich men. If you're accustomed to the Italian at home, it will astonish you to see how he works when he's out of his own country, and how provident he is—a regular Chinaman. Tchuk-Tchuk was alone, and he worked like a slave. He was at his stand, day in, day out; if the sun burned, if there was a gale; he was often wet through, but no one could pass without receiving a smile from his teeth and a hand stretched out with some gimcrack or other. He always tried to impress the women, with whom he did most of his business—especially the *cocotterie*. Ah! how he looked at them with his great eyes! Temperamentally, I dare say, he was vicious enough; but, as you know, it costs money to be vicious, and he spent no money. His expenses were twopence a day for food and fourpence for his bed in a *café* full of other birds of his feather—sixpence a day, three shillings and sixpence a week. No other sort of human creature can keep this up long. My minimum is tenpence, which is not a bed of roses; but, then, I can't do without tobacco (to a man in extreme poverty a single vice is indispensable).

But these "Italians" do without even that. Tchuk-Tchuk sold; not very hard work, you say? Try it for half an hour; try and sell something good—and Tchuk-Tchuk's things were rubbish—flash coral jewellery, Italian enamels made up into pins and brooches, celluloid gimcracks. In the evenings I've often seen him doze off from sheer fatigue, but always with his eyes half-open, like a cat. His soul was in his stall; he watched everything—but only to sell his precious goods, for nothing interested him; he despised all the world around him—the people, the sea, the amusements; they were ridiculous and foreign. He had his stall, and he lived to sell. He was like a man shut up in a box—with not a pleasure, not a sympathy, nothing wherewith to touch this strange world in which he found himself.

"I'm of the South," he would say to me, jerking his head at the sea; "it's hard there. Over there I got a girl. She wouldn't be sorry to see me again; not too sorry! Over there one starves; name of a Saint," (he chose this form of oath, no doubt, because it sounded Christian), "it's hard there!"

I am not sentimental about Tchuk-Tchuk; he was an egoist to the bottom of his soul, but that did not in the least prevent his suffering for the want of his South, for the want of his sunshine, and his girl—the greater the egoism the greater the suffering. He craved like a dumb animal; but, as he remarked, "Over there one starves!" Naturally he had not waited for that. He had his hopes. "Wait a bit!" he used to say. "Last year I was in Brussels. Bad business! At the end they take away all my money for the Society, and give me this stall. This is all right—I make some money this season."

He had many clients among "women of morals," who had an eye for his beautiful head of hair, who know, too, that life is not all roses; and there was something pathetic in the persistency of Tchuk-Tchuk and the way his clothes hung about him like sacks; nor was he bad-looking, with his great black eyes and his slim, dirty hands.

One wet day I came on the Estacade when hardly a soul was there. Tchuk-Tchuk had covered his stall with a piece of old tarpaulin. He was smoking a long cigar.

"Aha! Tchuk-Tchuk," I said, "smoking?"

"Yes," says he, "it's good!"

"Why not smoke every day, you miser; it ould comfort you when you're hungry."

He shook his head. "Costs money," says he. "This one cost me nothing. A kind of an individual gave it me—a red-faced Englishman—said he couldn't smoke it. He knew nothing, the idiot—this is good, I tell you!"

But it was Tchuk-Tchuk who knew nothing—he had been too long without the means of knowledge. It was interesting to see the way he ate, drank, inhaled, and soaked up that rank cigar—a true revel of sensuality.

The end of the season came, and all of us birds who prey on the visitors were getting ready to fly; but I stayed on, because I like the place—the gay-coloured houses, the smell of fish in the port, the good air, the long green seas, the dunes; there's something of it all in my blood, and I'm always sorry to leave. But after the season is over—as Tchuk-Tchuk would say—"Name of a saint—one starves over there!"

One evening, at the very end, when there were scarcely twenty visitors in the place, I

went as usual to a certain *café*, with two compartments, where every one comes whose way of living is dubious—bullies, comedians, off-colour actresses, women of morals, "Turks," "Italians," "Greeks"—all such, in fact, as play the game of stealing—a regular rag-shop of cheats and gentlemen of industry—very interesting people, with whom I am well acquainted. Nearly every one had gone; so that evening there were but few of us in the restaurant, and in the inner room three Italians only. I passed into that.

Presently in came Tchuk-Tchuk, the first time I had ever seen him in a place where one could spend a little money. How thin he was, with his little body and his great head! One would have said he hadn't eaten for a week. A week? A year! Down he sat, and called for a bottle of wine; and at once he began to chatter and snap his fingers.

"Ha, ha!" says one of the Italians; "look at Tchuk-Tchuk. What a nightingale he has become all of a sudden. Come, Tchuk-Tchuk, give us some of your wine, seeing you're in luck!"

Tchuk-Tchuk gave us of his wine, and ordered another bottle.

"Ho, ho!" says another Italian, "must have buried his family, this companion!" We drank—Tchuk-Tchuk faster than all. Do you know that sort of thirst, when you drink just to give you the feeling of having blood in the veins at all? Most people in that state can't stop—they drink themselves dead drunk. Tchuk-Tchuk was not like that. He was careful, as always, looking to his future. Oh! he kept his heart in hand; but in such cases a little goes a long way; he became cheerful—it doesn't take much to make an Italian cheerful who has been living for months on water and half-rations of bread and macaroni. It was evident, too, that he had reason to feel gay. He sang and laughed, and the other Italians sang and laughed with him. One of them said: "It seems our Tchuk-Tchuk has been doing good business. Come, Tchuk-Tchuk, tell us what you have made this season!"

But Tchuk-Tchuk only shook his head.

"Eh!" said the Italian, "the shy bird. It ought to be something good. As for me,

comrades, honestly, five hundred francs is all I've made—not a centime more—and the half of that goes to the patron."

And each of them began talking of his gains, except Tchuk-Tchuk, who showed his teeth, and kept silence.

"Come, Tchuk-Tchuk," said one, "don't be a bandit—a little frankness!"

"He won't beat my sixteen hundred!" said another.

"Name of a Saint!" said Tchuk-Tchuk suddenly, "what do you say to four thousand?"

But we all laughed.

"La, la!" said one, "he mocks us!"

Tchuk-Tchuk opened the front of his old frock-coat.

"Look!" he cried, and he pulled out four bills—each for a thousand francs. How we stared!

"See," said he, "what it is to be careful—I spend nothing—every cent is here! Now I go home—I get my girl; wish me good journey!" He set to work again to snap his fingers.

We stayed some time and drank another bottle, Tchuk-Tchuk paying. When we parted

nobody was helpless, only, as I say, Tchuk-Tchuk on the road to the stars, as one is after a six months' fast. The next morning I was drinking a "bock" in the same *café*, for there was nothing else to do, when all of a sudden who should come running in but this same Tchuk-Tchuk! Ah! but he was no longer on the road to the stars. He flung himself down at the table, with his head between his hands, and the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"They've robbed me," he cried, "robbed me of every sou; robbed me while I slept. I had it here, under my pillow; I slept on it; it's gone—every sou!" He beat his breast.

"Come, Tchuk-Tchuk," said I, "from under your pillow? That's not possible!"

"How do I know?" he groaned; "it's gone, I tell you—all my money, all my money. I was heavy with the wine—" All he could do was to repeat again and again— "All my money, all my money!"

"Have you been to the police?"

He had been to the police. I tried to console him, but without much effect, as you may imagine. The boy was beside himself.

The police did nothing—why should they? If he had been a Rothschild it would have been different, but seeing he was only a poor devil of an Italian who had lost his all——!

Tchuk-Tchuk had sold his stall, his stock, everything he had, the day before, so he had not even the money for a ticket to Brussels. He was obliged to walk. He started—and to this day I see him starting, with his little hard hat on his beautiful black hair, and the unsewn ends of his tie. His face was like the face of the Devil thrown out of Eden!

What became of him I cannot say, but I do not see too clearly in all this the compensation of which you have been speaking.

And Ferrand was silent.

1904.

JOY OF LIFE

IT was in the neighbourhood of Berkeley Square, and I had come out of a drawing-room, warm, scented and full of "portable property." The hall door was closed behind me, the East wind caught me in the face, and I walked into a child.

She may have been five years old. With a scanty red petticoat widespread over her humped-up knees, she was sitting on the pavement and beating it with a bit of withered branch decorated with three or four brown leaves. In time to the beating she chanted a song. Blackish-brown curls hung all about her round, smutty little face; the remains of a hat rested beside her on the pavement; and two reckless, little black devils looked out of her eyes.

She was so delightful a contrast to the "portable property" that it was impossible not to stare at her.

So I went down the street crabwise.

She knew I was going crabwise, she knew the position of the "bobby" at the corner, she knew everything all round her. And when she saw me vanishing she began to flirt with me. She put her head on one side like a terrier asking for cake, and looked up through her tangle of curls. She smiled—I smiled, and went round the corner. There was a little patter of hobnails, and *she* came round the corner. If she was queer on the ground, she was queerer on her feet; she had clapped her hat—the last bit of a large girl's hat—on the back of her head; her short, red petticoat gaped, her bare brown legs were thrust into a woman's boots. She shuffled along behind, beating the railings with her branch. Sometimes she ranged up alongside, shot a shy glance at my top-hat, and fell back again.

People passed and stared at her, but she paid no attention.

In Oxford Street we stopped and held a conversation. It began and ended thus:

"Would you like some sweets?" I left her sucking a sixpence, staring after me with her

great black eyes, and beating a shop window with her branch.

But when I looked round again she was dancing to a barrel-organ with some other children, her petticoat a little red teetotum in the crowded street.

1899.

BEL COLORE

ON one side of the road, a grove of olives; on the other a rose-hung villa, maize-coloured, with faded shutters, and a vanished name on the gate. In front, a tall palm lurching unpruned out of tangled shrubs; at the side, a crimson garment on a line. The *déshabille* of an eternal siesta!

Overhead the sky sapphire, with a western blaze of gold; the breeze rustling in the palm leaves; a goat's bell tinkling, a scent of burning wood, the croaking of frogs.

In a tarnished cage, at a second story window, a parrot, with a yellow head, nasally chanting: "Niculi ni-co-la!"

Three children pass, and lift their faces. The sun throws a glow under their hats. They call: "Scratch-a-Poll, poll!" The eldest, a fair-haired English boy, lingers, and as he looks, a young girl with cheeks like poppies and eyes like jet, with a short red dress and

bushy black-brown hair, comes out, and stands in the doorway. He wavers, snatches at his hat, blushes and stands still. She walks off, swinging in her rounded hand a little strap-full of books. She turns her head for just a second. Her voice rings out clear; repeating what she has heard, like her own parrot:

"Go to bed im-me-diate-lee you *naugh*-tee lee-tle *bambino*"; and laughing a mocking little laugh.

The boy hangs his head, clutches his hat, breaks into a run. The little girl moves sunwards, swaying her hips demurely like a grown woman. She looks with half-closed eyes straight at the road in front of her; and slowly her grave little figure,—symbol of the South's languor, cruelty, and love,—fades to a crimson stain on the line of the dusty road.

1899.

A PILGRIMAGE

I SAW them from the top of a Hammersmith 'bus, sitting on the smart white doorstep of a house opposite the Albert Memorial. It was a very hot, bright day; the cabs and carriages of the fashionable were streaming by, and people loitered in the sunshine, while these three small pilgrims sat on that doorstep.

The biggest, a boy of six, held on his slippery lap a baby with a huge head and an aspect of measles, whose fist, like a lump of paste, was thrust into its cheek, whose eyes were screwed up, whose feet emerged limply from the bundle of its body. And now and then the boy heaved it up, and looked into its face.

A girl, younger than the boy, with a fair, patient, dirty little face, and large circles round her eyes, in a short loose frock of faded blue, which showed her little bare knees, leaned against the doorpost; she had no hat, and was fast asleep. The boy himself stared

before him with big brown eyes. His hair was dark and his ears projected; his clothes were decent, but dusty from head to foot. His eyes were those of people who get through the day somehow, and are very tired at the end. I spoke to him.

"Is that your sister?"

"No."

"What then?"

"A friend!"

"And that?"

"My brother."

"Where do you live?"

"Regent's Pawk."

"How did you get as far as this?"

"Came to see Albert Mermorial."

"Are you very tired?"

No answer.

"Here's a shilling; now you can go home in a 'bus."

No answer, no smile; but a grubby hand closing over the shilling.

"Do you know how much that is?"

His face twinkled with contempt; he heaved his brother slowly.

"Twelve pennies."

Glancing back I saw him holding his brother very tight, and stirring up his "friend" with his boot to look at the shilling.

1900.

THE KINGS

LONDON sun has robbed the leaves of freshness. No watercart passes. My dog pants with the heat, his tongue lolling from his dripping mouth. No traffic in this quiet backwater, with its steep ascent, its studios, its stables, its trees.

In the road, before a high house, stands a flushed and ragged woman clutching some sprigs of lavender, and on the curbstone sits another. Out of her dirty rag of shawl peeps the weazened little face of a baby, sucking at the twisted, ragged rubber of an unclean empty bottle. This baby is staring out at the world —so vast, so full of heat and dust and hunger— with eyes that seem full of knowledge. This baby has found out all there is to know. Its eyes are patient, close to the lean breast of her whose eyes also are patient.

"My sister—poor thing—an' her little byby. 'Er 'usband's left her. We've walked from

Brighton, so 'elp me! Gawd love you, sir, buy a sprig o' lavender!"

Two feet from the street dust and dirt, the mother and the baby look up.

"Gawd love you, sir, buy a sprig o' lavender!"

Of lavender! . . .

In the hall of the high house the sun dances through the chinks of the blinds; in that dancing, shadowy light, people glide, and whisper, and smile.

Upstairs, where everything is cool, a new mother lies in her white bed. By her feet the nurse stands, with the new baby in her arms, fat, sleek, cowled like a bishop; round him are faces, awed and delighted, wondering at this snug atom in its speckless wool and dimity.

A sound; all tremble!

The clock ticks, the nurse's shoes patter, the hum of worship rises. With the evening drifts in the scent of limes; and on the pillows of her white bed the mother is smiling.

King out there in the heat—King in here in the cool—You have come into your Kingdoms!

1904.

APOTHEOSIS

"AH! now that's good!" said the bald man in the stalls, and the misanthropic man beside him hiccoughed.

"Ha, ha!" roared the stout man with the eyeglass.

"I *say!*" remarked the fourth man naïvely.

On the stage of the "Paradise," an elephant had been turned on its back and enclosed in a plush frame.

"Look at his eye!" laughed the bald man: "Ha, ha!"

All four looked. The inverted elephant's tiny eye—the only moving thing in that grey mass—travelled in a quest among the audience, then fixed a stoic gleam on his forelegs raised in the air like pillars. A world to itself, that eye—a little wild world apart—in all this theatre, domed with gold, starred with lamps, thronged with faces turned all in one direction.

"Ha, ha! Look at his eye!" The ele-

phant's eye had travelled round again, and the naïve man murmured:

"I say, it's awfully funny!"

"Most intelligent animals!" the stout man said, adjusting his eyeglass.

"Do you suppose," asked the naïve man, "that it's done by kindness?"

The bald man squeezed his opera hat.

"Impossible to tell!" he said. "Look at the beggar's trunk!"

The elephant, tired of hanging his trunk towards the audience, had curled it on his chest.

"Like a bloated caterpillar!" murmured the misanthropic man.

Two anxious-looking Persian cats, and two red-breasted parrots with thin gilt chains fastened to their legs appeared from different quarters, and perched one on each foot of the inverted elephant.

"Pretty smart that!" the bald man said.

After one furtive moment, the cats and parrots had begun to leap from foot to foot; the upturned elephant rolled his little eye, and writhed his trunk.

"Now, I call that wonderful!" the bald man cried; "so intelligent!"

"I knew a cat once," complained the misanthropic man, "as intelligent as a human bein'!"

"Come, come!" said the stout man.

"What price that!" the bald man eagerly interrupted.

The elephant had raised his trunk with a parrot on its tip, and slowly held it out to the audience.

"Not bad!" the stout man cried. "Ha, ha!"

"Any cats almost," insisted the misanthrope, "are as intelligent as human bein's!"

"What!" the stout man said, "d'you tell me a lot of cats would appreciate a thing like this—d'you tell me a lot of cats would see anything funny in that elephant?"

The bald man broke in: "I admire the training; shows what can be done with determination—wants a strong will to get cats and parrots to work together."

"Yes, by Jove!" the stout man said. "I like a good animal show. I'm fond of animals myself. Some people don't seem to care a

kick about 'em. Funny-looking beast on his back—an elephant!"

"Do you think he likes it?" mused the naïve man.

The cats and parrots had vanished now, and a single little kitten, faintly mewing, came and curled itself up in the great beast's mouth.

"I say!" the misanthrope remarked with sudden interest, "how jolly natural! What a little ripper, eh?" and he too applauded.

The elephant's tiny eye seemed to inquire the meaning of that cheer.

"So much for the intelligence of cats!" the stout man said. "Where'd you have got your baby to go fooling round in an elephant's mouth?"

"That proves nothing," the misanthrope replied; "all I meant about cats was, that people are fools, mostly!"

The showman now removed the kitten, and standing on the elephant's chest, blew kisses to the audience. Then, summoning the trunk to him, he placed a lighted cigarette in its tip.

"Bravo!" the bald man cried; "now that's what I call really clever! Bravo!"

"I tell you what," the stout man said: "I've been watching him—and he don't *like* it."

"Don't like what?" the misanthrope enquired.

"Very few animals can stand smoke," the stout man said. "I had a pony once, though, that would snuff it up like fun."

The elephant replaced the cigarette between the showman's lips; a shiver ran through his huge frame.

"Look at his eye now!" the bald man said. "It's really damn funny, isn't it?"

"Well!" yawned the misanthrope. "I've had about enough of this footy elephant!"

And as if in accordance with that sentiment, the showman began a little hastily unloosening the bands of the plush frame; and suddenly the creature trumpeted.

"He's asking to be let up," the stout man wheezed; "I don't care what you say, I call it doosid good. It's all so natural. Some fellows," he added in an irritated voice, "don't care a curse for animals!"

"Looks to me as if he'd turned sulky," the bald man said. "See his eye now!"

"Yes!" the stout man answered, "that's where animals will fail; they've got no sense of humour. See that elephant's eye; for all it's deuced clever, it's got no sense of humour!"

And that little eye—that round wild little world apart, with its quick, mournful roll, seemed answering, "Alas! no sense of humour!"

"I can't help wondering whether they like it," the naïve man murmured, as though loth to harbour doubts about a sight he had so much enjoyed.

"Like it? Of course they like it! They're most intelligent!" said the stout man, dropping his eyeglass, as the curtain fell. "A show of this sort is what I call the apoth—apotheosis of intelligence. It's not every one can appreciate it, or every animal can stand it. There's pigs now," he added, staring absently around him with his eyeglass, "and donkeys—! What price them!"

1903.

THE WORKERS

THE little, squat, dark houses with snow-sprinkled roofs, having windows like the blurred eyes of old people, ran curving away from the thoroughfare. Built so long ago that they seemed as the ghosts of departed dwellings, they harboured countless workers, who could be seen plying their needles by the afternoon light, gleaming yellowish under a snow-laden sky. Indeed, in some windows tallow candles were already burning.

Unlike the doors of the shiftless, these street doors, to which clung the memory of paint, were religiously closed, and it was necessary to tap before one could enter. The woman who opened the last of those doors was about fifty-five years of age, and dressed in very crumpled clothes as of one always sitting down, with a face dissected by deep furrows so that no two features seemed to belong to one another. She held in one hand a threaded needle,

in the other a pair of trousers, to which she had been adding the accessories demanded by our civilisation. One had never seen her without a pair of trousers in her hand, because she could only manage to supply them with decency at the rate of seven or eight pairs a day, working twelve hours. For each pair she received seven farthings, and used nearly one farthing's worth of cotton; and this gave her an income, in good times, of six to seven shillings a week. But some weeks there were no trousers to be had, and then it was necessary to live on the memory of those which had been, together with a little sum put by from weeks when trousers were more plentiful. Deducting two shillings and threepence for rent of the little back room, there was therefore, on an average, about two shillings and ninepence left for the sustenance of herself and husband, who was fortunately a cripple, and somewhat indifferent whether he ate or not. And looking at her face, so furrowed, and at her figure, of which there was not much, one could well understand that she, too, had long established within her such internal economy as was suit-

able to one who had been "in trousers" twenty-seven years, and, since her husband's accident fifteen years before, in trousers only, finding her own cotton.

Her face was long and narrow, her eyes grey, and they looked at one as though they knew she ought to ask whether anything could be done for her, and knew, too, that she would not.

She spoke, indeed, very little except about her trousers. Oh! they *were* so common! so *paltry*, no quality at all! And lately they had been giving her boys' knickerbockers. She had "no patience" with *them*, which took every bit as much cotton, and brought you less money. In old days it had been a better class of trouser altogether, but now there seemed no heart in them—no heart at all! And they were so irregular! But you couldn't blame the woman who had them of the tailors, and gave them out—she let you have as many as she could, and only got a farthing a pair for herself. So there it was!

A bed which had neither legs, nor clothes that could be recognised as clothes, took up

the greater part of the little room, which was fuller of rags, charred pans, chipped crockery, and trousers, than any room of its size ever seen. On this bed a black cat with a white nose was sleeping. Bits of broken wooden boxes were heaped up, waiting to feed the small fire. And on the wall by the side of this fire hung the ghost of a toasting fork. Very lonely and thin was that wispy piece of iron, as though for many days it had lacked bread. Hooked to the wall, with its prongs turned upwards, it was like the black shrivelled husk of an arm and hand, asking for more with its spidery fingers.

Its owners were seated with their backs to it; she just under the tightly-closed window, so as to use as long as possible a kind of light for which she had not to pay; and her husband with his crippled leg almost in the fire. He was a man with a round, white face, a little grey moustache curving down like a parrot's beak, and round whitish eyes. In his aged and unbuttoned suit of grey, with his head held rather to one side, he looked like a parrot—a bird clinging to its perch, with one grey leg

shortened and crumpled against the other. He talked, too, in a toneless, equable voice, looking sideways at the fire, above the rims of dim spectacles, and now and then smiling with a peculiar disenchanted patience.

No—he said—it was no use to complain; did no good! Things had been like this for years, and so, he had no doubt, they always would be. There had never been much in trousers; not this common sort that anybody'd wear, as you might say. Though he'd never seen anybody wearing such things; and where they went to he didn't know—out of England, he should think. Yes, he had been a carman; run over by a dray. Oh! yes, they had given him something—four bob a week; but the old man had died and the four bob had died too. Still, there he was, sixty years old—not so very bad for his age. *She* couldn't get through half the work but for him holding the things for her, and pressing them, and one thing and another—not up to much, of course—but he could do all that!

With those words he raised his right hand, which clasped a pair of linings, and there

passed between his whitish eyes and the grey eyes of his wife one of those looks which people who have long lived together give each other. It had no obvious gleam of affection, but just the matter-of-fact mutual faith of two creatures who from year's end to year's end can never be out of arm's length of one another. For, as he said, they were not much of goers-out, though he did get out once in a way when the weather was fine, and *she* had to go out to get her work and come back again. His eyes, travelling round the chaotic, grimy little room, which was as much the whole world to them as ever was his cell to a prisoner, rested on the cat, coiled up on the ragged bedclothes. Oh, yes! The cat. There she was, always asleep. She was a bit of company. They didn't see much company; kept themselves to themselves. Low neighbourhood—people very funny! Yes, there was nice enough buildings round the corner. But you had to be in a good position to live in them. Seven-and-six a week—and pay it sharp. Not but what they weren't sharp after their rent here! Just a working man—their landlord—who'd got to

pay his rent himself, so what could you expect? A little spurt of work just now, of course, owing to Christmas. Soon drop down again to nothing afterwards—oh, yes!

Smiling his strange smile, as of a man almost amused at what Fate had devised for him, he reached down and fed the fire with a piece of broken box; then resumed his upright posture, with his head bent a little to one side so that it favoured his withered leg. They were talking, he had heard said, about doing something for trousers. But what could you do for things like these, at half-a-crown a pair? People must have 'em, so you'd got to make 'em. There you were, and there you would be! *She* went and heard them talk. They talked very well, she said. It was intellectual for her to go. He couldn't go himself, owing to his leg. He'd like to hear them talk. Oh, yes! And he was silent, staring sideways at the fire, as though in the thin crackle of the flames attacking the fresh piece of wood, he were hearing the echo of that talk from which he was cut off. "Lor bless you!" he said suddenly, "they'll do nothing! Can't!" And, stretching out his dirty

hand he took from his wife's lap a pair of trousers, and held it up. "Look at 'em! Why, you can see right through 'em, linings and all. Who's goin' to pay more than 'alf-a-crown for that? Where they go to I can't think. Who wears 'em? Some Institution I should say. They talk, but dear me, they'll never do anything so long as there's thousands, like us, glad to work for what we can get. Best not to think about it, I say."

And laying the trousers back on his wife's lap, he resumed his sidelong stare into the fire.

The snow-laden sky seemed to have drawn nearer, so little light was there in the room; and there was no sound, as though the last word had been spoken, and the fire exhausted. In that motionless and soundless twilight the toasting fork on the wall alone seemed to be alive, with its thin, tortured prongs asking for that for which those two had never asked.

1909.

A MILLER OF DEE

MACCREEDY was respectable, but an outcast in his village.

There was nothing against him; on the contrary, he held the post of ferry-man to the people of the Manor, and nightly explained in the bar-parlour that if he had not looked sharp after his rights he would have been a salaried servant: "At a fixed wage, ye'll understand, without a chance to turn an honest penny."

He turned the honest pennies by exacting sixpenny ferry tolls from every person who was not a member of the Manor family. His doctrine, preached nightly, was that the gentry were banded to destroy the rights of the poor; yet, in spite of this, which should have conferred on him popularity, he was subtly and mysteriously felt to be a spiritual alien. No one ever heard him object to this unwritten, unspoken verdict; no one knew, in fact, whether he was aware of it. On still evenings

he could be seen sitting in his boat in the Manor pool, under the high-wooded cliff, as if brooding over secret wrongs. He was a singer, too, with a single song, "The Miller of Dee," which he gave on all occasions; the effort of producing it lent his mouth a ludicrous twist under his whitey-brown moustache. People on the Manor terrace above could hear him sing it at night in an extraordinarily flat voice, as he crossed the river back to his cottage below.

No one knew quite where he came from, though some mentioned Ireland; others held a Scotch theory; and one man, who had an imagination, believed him to be of Icelandic origin. This mystery rankled in the breast of the village—the village of white cottages, with its soft, perpetual crown of smoke, and its hard north-country tongue. MacCreedy was close about money, too—no one knew whether he had much money or little.

Early one spring he petitioned for a holiday, and disappeared for a month. He returned with a wife, a young anæmic girl, speaking in a Southern accent. A rather interesting creature, this wife of MacCreedy, very silent, and

with a manner that was unconsciously, and, as it were, ironically submissive.

On May mornings her slender figure, which looked as if it might suddenly snap off at the waist, might be seen in the garden, hanging clothes out to dry, or stooping above the vegetables; while MacCreedy watched her in a possessive manner from the cottage doorway. Perhaps she symbolised victory to him, a victory over his loneliness; perhaps he only looked on her as more money in his stocking. She made no friends, for she was MacCreedy's wife, and a Southerner; moreover, MacCreedy did not want her to make friends. When he was out it was she who would pull the ferry-boat over, and, after landing the passengers, remain motionless, bowed over her sculls, staring after them, as though loth to lose the sound of their footsteps; then she would pull slowly back across the swirl of silver-brown water, and, tying up the boat, stand with her hand shading her eyes. MacCreedy still went to the "public" at nights, but he never spoke of his wife, and it was noticed that he stared hard with his pug's eyes at any one who asked

after her. It was as though he suspected the village of wanting to take her from him. The same instinct that made him bury his money in a stocking bid him bury his wife. Nobody gave him anything, none should touch his property!

Summer ripened, flushed full, and passed; the fall began. The river came down ruddy with leaves, and often in the autumn damp the village was lost in its soft mist of smoke. MacCreedy became less and less garrulous, he came to the "public" seldom, and in the middle of his drink would put his glass down, and leave, as though he had forgotten something. People said that Mrs. MacCreedy looked unhappy; she ceased to attend church on Sundays. MacCreedy himself had never attended.

One day it was announced in the village that Mrs. MacCreedy's mother was ill—that Mrs. MacCreedy had gone away to nurse her; and, in fact, her figure was no more seen about the cottage garden beneath the cliff. It became usual to ask MacCreedy about his mother-in-law, for the question seemed to annoy him.

He would turn his head, give a vicious tug at the sculls, and answer, "Oh! aye, a wee bit better!"

Tired perhaps of answering this question, he gave up going to the "public" altogether, and every evening, when the shadows of the woods were closing thick on the water, he could be seen staring over the side of his boat moored in the deep backwater below his cottage; the sound of his favourite song was heard no more. People said: "He misses his wife!" and for the first time since he had been amongst them, a feeling for him almost amounting to warmth grew up in the village.

Early one morning, however, the underkeeper, who had an old-time grudge against MacCreedy, after an hour of patient toil, fished Mrs. MacCreedy up from the bottom of the backwater. She was neatly sewn in a sack, weighted with stones, and her face was black. They charged MacCreedy, who wept, and said nothing. He was removed to the County gaol.

At his trial he remained dumb, and was found guilty. It was proved among other things that Mrs. MacCreedy had no mother.

While he was waiting to be hanged, he asked for the chaplain, and made the following statement:—

"Parson," said he, "I'm not caring what ye have to say—ye will get plenty of chance to talk when I'm gone. It's not to you I'm speaking, nor to anybody in particular—I'm just lonely here; it's a luxury to me to see a face that's not that gravy-eyed old warder's. I don't believe ye're any better than me, but if I did, what then? It's meself I've got to make me peace with. Man, d'ye think I'd have kept me independence if I'd ha' believed the likes of ye? They never had a good word for me down there, gentry as bad as the rest—the pack of fools! And why didn't they have a good word for me? Just because I'm an independent man. They'll tell ye that I was close; stingy they'll call it—and why was I close? Because I knew they were all against me. Why should I give 'em anything? They were all waitin' to take it from me! They'll say I set no store by my wife; but that's a lie, parson—why, she was all I had! As sure as I'm speaking to ye, if I hadn't done what

I did I'd have lost her. I was for guessing it all the autumn. I'm not one of those bodies that won't look a thing in the face; ye can't hoodwink me with palaver. I put it to ye, if ye had a diamond, wouldn't ye a sight sooner pitch it into the sea, than have it stolen? Ye know ye would! Well, she's just dead; and so'll I be when they squeeze the life out of me. Parson, don't ye go and blabber about her doin' wrong. She never did wrong; hadn't the time to. I wouldn't have ye take away her reputation when I'm gone and can't defend her. But there was, aye! the certainty that she would 'a done it; 'twas coming, d'ye see? Aye! but I was bound to lose her; and I'll tell ye how I made sure.

" 'Twas one day nigh the end of October; I emptied the ferry till, and I said to my wife: 'Jenny,' I said, 'ye'll do the ferry work to-day; I'm away to the town for a suit o' clothes. Ye will take care,' I said, 'that no one sneaks over without paying ye his proper saxpence.'

" 'Very well, MacCreedy,' she says. With that I put some bread and meat in a bit of paper, and had her ferry me across. Well, I

went away up the road till I thought she would have got back; and then I turned round and came softly down again to the watter; but there she was, still sitting where I'd left her. I was put aback by that, parson; ye know what it is when your plans get upset. 'Jenny,' I said to her, as if I came for the very purpose, 'ye'll look sharp after them fares?'

" 'Yes,' she says, 'MacCreedy.' And with that she turns the boat round. Well, presently I came down again, and hid in some bushes on the bank, and all day I stayed there watching. Have ye ever watched a rabbit trap? She put four people across the river, and every time I saw them pay her. But late in the afternoon that man—the devil himself, the same I was lookin' after—came down and called out 'Ferry!' My wife she brought the ferry over, and I watched her close when he stepped in. I saw them talking in the boat, and I saw him take her hands when he left it. There was nothing more to see, for he went away. I waited till evening, then out I crept and called 'Ferry!' My wife came down—she was aye ready—and fetched me across. The

first thing I did was to go to the till and take out four saxpences. 'Oh,' I said, 'Jenny, ye've had four fares then?'

" 'Yes,' she said, 'just four.'

" 'Sure?' I said.

" 'Sure,' she said, 'MacCreedy.'

"Have ye ever seen the eyes of a rabbit when the fox is nigh her?

"I asked her who they were, and when she told me the names of the first four, and never another name, I knew I'd lost her. She got to bed presently, and after she was in bed I waited, sitting by the fire. The question I put to meself was this: 'Will I let them have her? Will I let them tak' her away?' The sweat ran off me. I thought maybe she'd forgotten to name him, but there was her eyes; and then, where was his saxpence? In this life, parson, there's some things ye cannot get over.

" 'No,' I said to meself, 'either ye've took up with him, or else ye're goin' to tak' up with him, or ye'd ha' had his saxpence.' I felt myself heavier than lead. 'Ye'd ha' had his saxpence,' I said to meself; 'ther's no gettin'

over that.' I would have ye know that my wife was an obedient woman, she aye did what she was told, an' if it hadn't been for a vera good reason she'd ha' had his saxpence; there's no manner of doubt about it. I'm not one of those weak-minded bodies who believe that marriages are sacred; I 'm an independent man. What I say is, every man for himself, an' every woman too, and the less of cant the better. I don't want ye to have the chance to take away me reputation when I'm gone, with any such foolish talk. 'Twasn't the marriage; 'twas just the notion of their stealing her. I never owed any man of them a penny, or a good turn—him least of all; and was I to see them steal her and leave me bare? Just as they'd ha' stolen my saxpences; the very money out of me pocket, if I'd ha' let them. I ask ye, was I to do that? Was I to see meself going back to loneliness before me own eyes? 'No,' I said to meself; 'keep yourselves to yourselves, I'll keep meself to mine!' I went and took a look at her asleep, and I could fancy her with a smile as if she were glad to ha' done with me—going off with him to those others up at the

village to make a mock of me. I thought, 'Ye've got to do something, MacCreedy, or ye'll just be helping them to steal her from yerself.' But what could I do? I'm a man that looks things through and through, and sees what's logical. There was only one logic to this; but, parson, I cried while I was putting the pillow to her face. She struggled very little, poor thing—she was aye an obedient woman. I sewed her body up in a sack, and all the time I thought: 'There goes MacCreedy!' But I cannot say that I regretted it exactly. Human nature's no so very simple. 'Twas the hanging about the spot after, that was the ruin of me; if ye've got things valuable hidden up, ye're bound to hang around them, ye feel so lonely."

On the morning of his execution MacCreedy ate a good breakfast, and made a wan attempt to sing himself his favourite song:

> "I care for nobody—no, not I,
> And nobody cares for me!"

1903.

A PARTING

WHEN one is walking languidly under those trees where a few gold leaves are still hanging, and the scent of brown drying leaves underfoot, and the sweet, pungent scent of leaf bonfires is in the air, and the pursuing rustle of one's dog padding amongst leaf-mortality steals along close behind; then the beauty, and the pale, lingering sunshine, and the sadness are almost more than one can bear. It is all a wistful incarnation of the ghost that will sometimes visit even the sanest soul, with the words: Death! And then?

On such a day there is no refuge. It does not seem worth while to take interest in a world touched with mortality, it is even impossible to differentiate between the prosperous and the unfortunate; for the pleasures and pains of the body, riches and destitution, seem like twin sisters in the presence of that rustling of dead leaves. The pale candles of life are flickering, waiting to resign, and join darkness.

On such a day the sky is the greatest comfort a man can have; for though he feels terribly that it will never part, and let his eyes peer on and on till they see the top of eternity, still it is high, free, has a semblance of immortality, and perhaps is made up of all the spirit breath that has abandoned dead leaves and the corpses of men.

On such a day, when love, like a discouraged bird, moves her wings faintly, it is well to stand still, and look long at the sky. The haunting scents, the pursuing rustle, may then for a brief while become deserters; for up there it seems as though the wings of Harmony were still moving.

It was on such a day that in Kensington Gardens I saw the parting of two poor souls. They had been sitting side by side in the dim alley of chestnut trees which leads down past the Speke monument to the Serpentine—a tall, burly, bearded man, and a white wisp of a girl. There was nothing in any way remarkable about them; the man just an ordinary business type, the girl, probably, a governess. And they sat so motionless, talking in such low

voices, that I had quite forgotten them; for on that day, the tide of interest in one's fellow creatures was at low ebb. But suddenly I became conscious that they had risen. Half-hidden by the trunk of the chestnut tree, whose few broad leaves were so like hands stretched out to the pale sunlight, they stood close together, indifferent to my presence; and there was that in the way they were looking at each other which made one's heart ache. Deep down in the eyes of both, life was surely dying—dying quietly as ever were leaves just about to fall. And I knew, as certainly as though all their little history had been made plain, that this was a last meeting. Some fatal force was severing them, and though neither confessed, both knew that it was for ever.

"And you'll write to me?"

"And when I come back?"

But the words were spoken as though all words had the same lack of meaning to two desperate hearts each trying to comfort the other. From their talk it was clear that they were not man and wife, but it was certain too, by the way they touched and looked at one

another, that this was the parting of those who had been lovers; the least of their looks and touches was full of passion, quivering, alive. The girl had a little gold crucifix bound on her breast, and while the man talked, his thick fingers kept playing with it, turning it over and over, evidently without knowing what they were handling. She wore, too, a narrow band of ruby-coloured velvet at her neck; and when he stroked it, her eyes, of that pale blue the colour of flax flowers, darkened as if with delight. Her face, which was rather foreign-looking, with its high cheek-bones and ashen hair, had something of the wilted whiteness of a flower, turned up to him, and her hands, stroking and twisting at his sleeves, could no more keep still than her rapid, whispering voice with its little un-English accent. And he—that burly fellow—it was queer to see the twitching and quivering of his face, as though all the memories common to these two were trying to break through the thick mask of his flesh.

It must have been something very fateful to drag them apart in the full tide of their

passion; or was this perhaps only one more of those most pitiful of all episodes, when the twin grim facts of money and reputation have tramped in on love? It was hard to tell which was the stronger emotion on those faces so close to one another, pity for self, or pity for the other heart, about to be left lonely, to be bereft of its little share of immortality.

And then, without even a glance round to see if any one were looking, they clung together. There could—they felt—be no doing that in the street or at the railway station; but here, in shadow, under trees that knew well enough what partings were like, with no one to see them except one indifferent stranger and a spaniel dog stirring the dead leaves with its long, black nose—here they could try once again to forget.

Whatever their poor story—commonplace and little noble in the world's eye—they, thus clinging together, in their love and in the presence of its death, were symbolic of that autumn day, touched with mortality, when all things seemed to love, and yet lose love, and pass out into nothingness. There was no

statue in all those Gardens like this dark, pitiful group of two blotted into each other's arms, trying for a last moment to crush sorrow to death within the prison of their joined lips.

But when that kiss was over—what then? Would they have courage to turn and walk different ways, leaving their hearts hanging here in the air, framed by the sparse, wan leaves, and taking away, instead, within each of them a little hollow of rustling sound?

They had not that courage. They went together, their arms listless, the man trying to bear himself indifferently, the girl crying ever so quietly. And as they came nearer and nearer to the Gate, they walked always slower, till they had passed through it, and stood still on the edge of the pavement. And as though, indeed, they had left their hearts clinging in the air of the Gardens, evermore to haunt under those trees, they hardly even touched one another, but with one long, pitiful look, parted.

The sky had changed. It was still high, but as grey as a dove's wing; sunless, compounded of unshed tears. And a little cold, talking

wind had risen, so that when a leaf fell, it fled away, turned over, fluttered, and dropped. In this wind people hurried as though it were telling them things they wished not to hear; and the numbers of little birds balancing on the bared boughs seemed very silent; one could not tell whether they were happy.

In the alley of chestnut trees I tried to find the place where those two hearts had been left. The wind had blown over; it was lost in the wilderness of grey air. But though I could not see it, I knew it was there, that kiss for ever imprinted on the pale sunlight. And I hunted for it, desiring its warmth on this day that was like the death of love. I could not find it, and slowly walked home, the chill scents dying round me, the pursuing rustle of my dog, padding in leaf-mortality, creeping along behind.

1909.

A BEAST OF BURDEN

I WAS sitting, on a winter afternoon, in a second-class compartment of the Paris train. There was one empty seat, and presently a French sailor got in and filled it, carrying his luggage in a bundle—a heavy, thick young fellow, bolster-like in his dark blue clothes, and round cap with a dark-red fuzzy ball. He sat humped forward with a fist on either of his thighs; and his leathery, shaven face, as of an ugly and neglected child, so motionless, that there seemed no activity at all in his brain. Suddenly he coughed, long, almost silently, behind his hand.

The train started; we settled down to sleep or read, but the sailor sat motionless, coughing now and then his smothered, wheezing cough.

At Amiens, a collector looked at our tickets, and demanded from the sailor the difference between a second and third class fare. He fumbled it slowly, sadly, out of an old leather purse.

Again we started, but as though this incident had broken up his stoicism, the sailor stirred and spoke to me in French. He talked in a turgid, Flemish accent, not easy to understand, and at the end of every phrase dropped his lower lip as though he had spoken his last word. He was on his way—it seemed—from Dunkerque to join his ship at Cherbourg; and this had been the last train he could catch, to be in time. He had left his widowed mother without money, so that to pay this extra fare seemed terrible to him. For eighteen months he had been on foreign service—for eighteen days he had been at home; and he was now going back, to serve the remainder of his time on the China station. His brother had been killed by the Japanese, accidentally, being taken for a Russian. His father had been drowned off Iceland, in the summer fishing.

"*C'est mè qui a une mère, c'est mè qui est seul à la maison. C'est elle qui n'a pas le sou.*"

It was his only perfect sentence, and, as he finished it, he spat. Then, seeing from the faces of the company that this was not the thing to do, he smeared it over with a slow,

gritting movement of his foot. Looking up at me with his little, deep-set eyes, he then said: *"C'est mè qui est malade,"* and slowly: *"C'est mauvais pour les malades—l'climat en Chine?"*

I tried to reassure him, but he shook his head; and after a long pause, said again: *"C'est mè qui a une mère, c'est mè qui est seul à la maison. C'est elle qui n'a pas le sou."* Tell me—his eyes seemed to ask, why are these things so? Why have I a mother who depends on me alone, when I am being sent away to die?

He rubbed his fists on his rounded thighs, then rested them; and so, humped forward over his outspread arms, sat silent, staring in front of him with deep, dark, tiny eyes. He troubled me with no further speech; he had relieved his soul. And, presently, like a dumb, herded beast, patient, mute, carrying his load, he left me at the terminus; but it was long before I lost the memory of his face and of that chant of his: *"C'est mè qui est seul à la maison. . . C'est mè qui a une mère. C'est elle qui n'a pas le sou!"*

1905.

THE LIME TREE

I WAS lying on a bank one July afternoon close to a large lime tree. The bees were busy among her long, drooping, honey-coloured blossoms; the wind was fluttering all her leaves, swaying her boughs, and drifting her scent towards me. And I was thinking, as I watched her, of the Hindu theory of Art—how, according to that theory, her external shape was of no significance to the artist, and all that mattered was the idea of "tree," only to be realised by long and devoted contemplation. For some minutes I myself tried to contemplate her, gazing through her green-clothed branches to see if I could indeed see her spirit; then, as is the habit in Western minds, my thoughts went wandering off, chasing each other like the little buff or blue butterflies that were all round me skimming between the spikes of grass and the soft tops of the clover.

There were some red cattle in the field beyond, and they too distracted my attention, and in the distance a line of moorland, with a pile of stones, like the figure of a man on the hillside. But presently my gaze came back to the lime tree. She was in a tumult now; the wind had entered her heart, and her shivering gust of emotion was such that one could not choose but look at her. It was the passion one sees when bees are swarming—a fierce, humming swirl of movement, as though she had suddenly gone mad with life and love. But soon this tumult died away; she was once more a perfumed, gracious, delicately alluring tree.

"Ah!" I thought, "when will you reveal your soul to me? Are you 'the essential tree' when you are cool and sweet, vaguely seductive, as now, or when you are being whirled in the arms of the wind and seem so furiously alive? When shall I see your very spirit?"

And again my thoughts went straying. This time they did not race like the butterflies, but drifted drowsily, as the black bumblebees were drifting among the foxgloves and

purple vetches. And slowly the sweetness of that lime tree seemed to gather round and imprison my senses, taking all strength from the wings of meditation, and dragging my head lower and lower to the grass. The uncanny, twilight state—half sleep—sweetest of all moments in life, when the world is still with you, yet moonlight-coloured with the coming fantasy of dreams, wrapped me as in the folds of a swoon.

And suddenly I saw lying close to me—yet separated by a gulf of nothingness, which was soft and cool to the touch of my face and hands—a woman, with amber-coloured hair falling over her breast and over creamy flowers growing stiffly round her, as might asphodels. Her fingers held a big black bee to her neck. Her body, though nearly hidden by those stiff, tall flowers, seemed very lovely; but it was her face that was so wonderful and sweet. It was a perfect oval, and so dear and tender as to make one's heart throb. The lips were faintly smiling, and beneath the eyebrows—arched and delicate—her eyes looked at me. Never were such velvety and dark and dewy

eyes! All round her were falling innumerable petals of the very faintest pink and honey colours; but her eyes kept stealing between them and fixing themselves on mine. There was at one corner of her mouth a tiny tuck or dimple, as might cling to the lips of a child when some one has been rough with her; and one ear, lying close to a great buttercup, was coloured by it, and looked like a little golden shell. The petals as they fluttered down were stirred by her breath, which seemed to me visible, of a silver hue, and full of strange, soft music.

Her eyes so shone with love, that I tried to raise myself and go to her. But I could not; and each time I failed there came into them such mournfulness, that I almost cried out. Yet, in spite of this mournful look, her lips continued to smile, and her form quivered all over amongst the tall, creamy, asphodel-like flowers; the hand which held the great black bee to her neck never ceased to stroke the creature with a finger that was like a moonbeam, so pale was it and long and soft.

And I thought: "She shall be loved as no

woman was ever loved by man! It is she that I have looked for all my life!" For so it seemed to me!

But the more I tried to raise myself and go to her, the less could I. And yet I felt, that if I could but reach her, I should faint with the sheer delight of it, and never more come to life and reason; and this I earnestly desired to do.

While I was thus looking and longing, a grey bird with a narrow tail, somewhat like a cuckoo, swept down, and, lodging in the crook of her bare arm, stared into her face with bright round eyes. And there sprang up in my heart burning jealousy that it should be so close to her, and I so far. The little shivers that passed down her bare arm, the colour of pearl, seemed to be caressing this bird, as the moonbeam of her finger was caressing the bee against her neck. I could see very well that these two creatures, so close to her heart, were happy; and the jealousy grew and grew in me, till with all my might I threw myself towards her; but the nothingness between us resisted me, and I fell back exhausted.

Then I saw her lift the finger, which caressed the bee; curving it towards herself, she looked at me; and on her lips there came the sweetest and strangest of all smiles. Seeing her smile thus I struggled desperately against the cold, smooth nothingness, and while I struggled I saw her quiver and writhe as though she too wanted to come to me. Her breast heaved, her eyes grew deeper, darker; they filled with glistening moisture, and seemed to entreat me. I tried to cry out to her, "I am coming!" But the words were pressed back into my lips by that chill, smooth nothingness, and slowly I saw her eyes grow mournful and wan, and her limbs cease quivering. Then, straining with a furious strength that I never thought to have had against the colourless, impalpable barrier, I crept forward inch by inch; and as I came nearer and nearer to her, I saw her eyes liven again, and begin to glow sweet and warm as the sun through heather honey or burnt wine; shivers ran through her limbs, a lock of her hair floated towards me, and there was such love in her face as no mortal has ever seen. The great, black bee, too, left her neck,

and flying poised within an inch of it, let forth from his wings the gentlest imaginable humming; even the bird on her arm, unafraid, moved its head up and down towards me, and fastened its soft, black eyes on my face as though aware that this was the moment of my triumph. I stretched out to her my arms, and at the touch of them she laughed. No sound that ever man heard was so tender as that laugh. Her hair brushed my lips; a drift of perfume smothered me. I sank into a delicious darkness, losing all sense of everything, as if I had been drowned. . . .

A lime-blossom loosened by the bees and the wind, had drifted across my lips; its scent was in my nostrils. There was nothing before me but the fields and the moor, and, close by, the lime tree. I looked at her. She seemed to me far away, coldly fair, formal in her green beflowered garb; but, for all that, I knew that, in my dream, I had seen and touched her soul.

1909.

THE NEIGHBOURS

IN the remote country, Nature, at first sight so serene, so simple, will soon intrude on her observer a strange discomfort; a feeling that some familiar spirit haunts the old lanes, rocks, wasteland, and trees, and has the power to twist all living things around into some special shape befitting its genius.

When moonlight floods the patch of moorland about the centre of the triangle between the little towns of Hartland, Torrington, and Holsworthy, a pagan spirit steals forth through the wan gorse; gliding round the stems of the lonely, gibbet-like fir-trees, peeping out amongst the reeds of the white marsh. That spirit has the eyes of a borderer, who perceives in every man a possible foe. And in fact, this high corner of the land has remained border to this day, where the masterful, acquisitive invader from the North dwells side by side with the unstable, proud, quick-blooded Celt-Iberian.

In two cottages crowning some fallow land two families used to live side by side. That long white dwelling seemed all one, till the eye, peering through the sweet-brier which smothered the right-hand half, perceived the rude, weather-beaten presentment of a Running Horse, denoting the presence of intoxicating liquors; and in a window of the left-hand half, that strange conglomeration of edibles and shoe-leather which proclaims the one shop of a primitive hamlet.

These married couples were by name Sandford at the eastern, and Leman at the western end; and he who saw them for the first time thought: "What splendid-looking people!"

They were all four above the average height, and all four as straight as darts. The innkeeper, Sandford, was a massive man, stolid, grave, light-eyed, with big fair moustaches, who might have stepped straight out of some Norseman's galley. Leman was lean and lathy, a regular Celt, with an amiable, shadowy, humorous face. The two women were as different as the men. Mrs. Sandford's fair, almost transparent cheeks coloured easily, her

eyes were grey, her hair pale brown; Mrs. Leman's hair was of a lustreless jet-black, her eyes the colour of a peaty stream, and her cheeks had the close creamy texture of old ivory.

Those accustomed to their appearance soon noted the qualifications of their splendour. In Sandford, whom neither sun nor wind ever tanned, there was a look as if nothing would ever turn him from acquisition of what he had set his heart on; his eyes had the idealism of the worshipper of property, ever marching towards a heaven of great possessions. Followed by his cowering spaniel, he walked to his fields (for he farmed as well as kept the inn) with a tread that seemed to shake the lanes, disengaging an air of such heavy and complete insulation that even the birds were still. He rarely spoke. He was not popular. He was feared, no one quite knew why.

On Mrs. Sandford, for all her pink and white, sometimes girlish look, he had set the mark of his slow, heavy domination. Her voice was seldom heard. Once in a while, however, her reserve would yield to garrulity,

as of water flowing through a broken dam. In these outbursts she usually spoke of her neighbours the Lemans, deploring the state of their marital relations. "A woman," she would say, "must give way to a man sometimes; I've had to give way to Sandford myself, I have." Her lips, from long compression, had become thin as the edge of a teacup; all her character seemed to have been driven down below the surface of her long, china-white face. She had not broken, but she had chipped; her edges had become jagged, sharp. The consciousness, that she herself had been beaten to the earth, seemed to inspire in her that waspish feeling towards Mrs. Leman—"a woman with a proud temper," as she would say in her almost lady-like voice; "a woman who's never bowed down to a man—that's what she'll tell you herself. 'Tisn't the drink that makes Leman behave so mad, 'tis because she won't give way to him. We're glad to sell drink to any one we can, of course; but 'tisn't that what's makin' Leman so queer. 'Tis her."

Leman, whose long figure was often to be seen seated on the wooden bench of his neigh-

bour's stone-flagged little inn, had, indeed, begun to have the soaked look and scent of a man never quite drunk, and hardly ever sober. He spoke slowly, his tongue seemed thickening; he no longer worked; his humorous, amiable face had grown hangdog and clouded. All the village knew of his passionate outbreaks, and bursts of desperate weeping; and of two occasions when Sandford had been compelled to wrest a razor from him. People took a morbid interest in this rapid deterioration, speaking of it with misgiving and relish, unanimous in their opinion that—"summat'd 'appen about that; the drink wer duin' for George Leman, *that* it wer, praaperly!"

But Sandford—that blond, ashy-looking Teuton—was not easy of approach, and no one cared to remonstrate with him; his taciturnity was too impressive, too impenetrable. Mrs. Leman, too, never complained. To see this black-haired woman, with her stoical, alluring face, come out for a breath of air, and stand in the sunlight, her baby in her arms, was to have looked on a very woman of the Britons. In conquering races the men,

they say, are superior to the women, in conquered races, the women to the men. She was certainly superior to Leman. That woman might be bent and mangled, she could not be broken; her pride was too simple, too much a physical part of her. No one ever saw a word pass between her and Sandford. It was almost as if the old racial feelings of this borderland were pursuing in these two their unending conflict. For there they lived, side by side under the long, thatched roof, this great primitive, invading male, and that black-haired, lithe-limbed woman of older race, avoiding each other, never speaking—as much too much for their own mates as they were, perhaps, worthy of each other.

In this lonely parish, houses stood far apart, yet news travelled down the May-scented lanes and over the whin-covered moor with a strange speed; blown perhaps by the west wind, whispered by the pagan genius of the place in his wanderings, or conveyed by small boys on large farm horses.

On Whit-Monday it was known that Leman had been drinking all Sunday; for he had been

heard on Sunday night shouting out that his wife had robbed him, and that her children were not his. All next day he was seen sitting in the bar of the inn soaking steadily. Yet on Tuesday morning Mrs. Leman was serving in her shop as usual—a really noble figure, with that lustreless black hair of hers—very silent, and ever sweetening her eyes to her customers. Mrs. Sandford, in one of her bursts of garrulity, complained bitterly of the way her neighbours had "gone on" the night before. But unmoved, ashy, stolid as ever, Sandford worked in the most stony of his fields.

That hot, magnificent day wore to its end; a night of extraordinary beauty fell. In the gold moonlight the shadows of the lime-tree leaves lay, blacker than any velvet, piled one on the other at the foot of the little green. It was very warm. A cuckoo called on till nearly midnight. A great number of little moths were out; and the two broad meadows which fell away from the hamlet down to the stream were clothed in a glamorous haze of their own moonlit buttercups. Where that marvellous moonlight spread out across the

moor it was all pale witchery; only the three pine-trees had strength to resist the wan gold of their fair visitor, and brooded over the scene like the ghosts of three great gallows. The long white dwelling of "the neighbours," bathed in that vibrating glow, seemed to be exuding a refulgence of its own. Beyond the stream a night-jar hunted, whose fluttering harsh call tore the garment of the scent-laden still air. It was long before sleep folded her wings.

A little past twelve o'clock there was the sound of a double shot. By five o'clock next morning the news had already travelled far; and before seven, quite a concourse had gathered to watch two mounted constables take Leman on Sandford's pony to Bideford gaol. The dead bodies of Sandford and Mrs. Leman lay—so report ran—in the locked bedroom at Leman's end of the neighbours' house. Mrs. Sandford, in a state of collapse, was being nursed at a neighbouring cottage. The Leman children had been taken to the Rectory. Alone of the dwellers in those two cottages, Sandford's spaniel sat in a gleam of early sunlight

under the eastern porch, with her nose fixed to the crack beneath the door.

It was vaguely known that Leman had "done for 'em"; of the how, the why, the when, all was conjecture. Nor was it till the assizes that the story of that night was made plain, from Leman's own evidence, read from a dirty piece of paper:

"I, George Leman, make this confession—so help me God! When I came up to bed that evening, I was far gone in liquor and so had been for two days off and on, which Sandford knows. My wife was in bed. I went up, and I said to her: 'Get up!' I said; 'do what I tell you for once!' 'I will not!' she said. So I pulled the bedclothes off her. When I saw her all white like that, with her black hair, it turned me queer, and I ran downstairs and got my gun, and loaded it. When I came upstairs again, she was against the door. I pushed, and she pushed back. She didn't call out, or say one word—but pushed; she was never one to be afraid. I was the stronger, and I pushed-in the door. She stood up against the bed, defying me with

her mouth tight shut, the way she had; and I put up my gun to shoot her. It was then that Sandford came running up the stairs and knocked the gun out of my hand with his stick. He hit me a blow over the heart with his fist, and I fell down against the wall, and couldn't move. And he said: 'Keep quiet!' he said, 'you dog!' Then he looked at her. 'And as for you,' he said, 'you bring it on yourself! You can't bow down, can't you? *I'll* bow you down for once!' And he took and raised his stick. But he didn't strike her, he just looked at her in her nightdress, which was torn at the shoulders, and her black hair ragged. She never said a word, but smiled at him. Then he caught hold of her by the arms, and they stood there. I saw her eyes; they were as black as two sloes. He seemed to go all weak of a sudden, and white as the wall. It was like as they were struggling which was the better of them, meaning to come to one another at the end. I saw what was in them as clear as I see this paper. I got up and crept round, and I took the gun and pointed it, and pulled the triggers one after the other, and

they fell dead, first him, then her; they fell quietly, neither of them made a noise. I went out, and lay down on the grass. They found me there when they came to take me. This is all I have to write, but it is true that I was far gone in liquor, which I had of him . . ."

1909.

THE RUNAGATES

EVERYTHING was still. It was sundown, there was not the faintest breeze to stir the warm, sleepy air.

Along the straggling street, the light lay soft on whitewashed houses, rounding the angles, and tingeing the walls, roofs, doorways with a faint, lustrous pink. In the open space by the Chapel of Ease, or at the doors of shops and houses were figures—lolling, or gossiping drowsily in the soft, Devonshire drawl.

In front of the Inn sprawled a spaniel pup, all head and legs, playing with its own ears, and gaping helplessly at the children who ran out of by-streets, chased each other lazily, and disappeared. An old man in fustian, with a bushy projecting beard, leaned heavily on a stick against the wall, turning to mutter sleepily to some one within. There was a faint, distant cawing of rooks, a smell of bacon and old hay, of burning wood, of honeysuckle.

Then on the nodding village came the sound of van-wheels, and with it a kind of stir and rustle.

That sound of wheels grew louder, then ceased; opposite the Chapel of Ease stood a gypsy van, cavernous, black, weather-stained, with baskets, strings of onions, pans, a tiny blue thread of rising smoke, a smell of old clothes.

The horse stood where it was stopped, without movement, drooping its tired head; by its side a gypsy girl stretched herself, resting on one leg, with her hands at the back of her head, where the light played tricks with her blue-black hair, giving it the colour of bronze.

Lithe as a snake, she glanced from side to side with dark eyes, hitching at her skirt, and settling a dingy scarf across her chest. Her angular features had the oblique cat-like cast of her race.

A broad old man with iron-grey hair and coppery visage leaned over the shaft, and talked to some one inside.

The stir and rustle began again.

Children were running out of houses, shops, alleys, everywhere—boys and girls. In white frocks, coloured frocks, with clean faces, and dirty faces; hustling each other on, then standing quite still.

Their hands were clasped in each others', their mouths wide open. They stood in a half-ring, many-coloured, hushed, a yard or two from the van, shuffling up the dust with their feet, whispering. Sometimes they would break a little, as if for flight, then close up nearer. An old woman, with thick hair and hooked nose, emerged from the van with a baby in her arms. A little girl clutching at her dress hid behind her. Continual quivers of sound like the trembling of telegraph wires ran through the ring of children.

The old woman put the baby into the man's arms, lifted the child to the front of the van, and moved away, talking quickly to the girl in a low voice. Their figures disappeared amongst the houses, and the ring of children sagged nearer to the van; fingers began to creep out, and point; on the outskirts boys took little runs to and fro.

Slowly the pink flush died out of the light, forms took harder outlines; a faint humming of gnats began; and suddenly the sound of voices broke forth, high-pitched in argument.

The old fellow against the Inn wall spat over the bush of his beard, stretched, called in an angry mutter, and stumped away, leaning on his stick; the spaniel puppy retreated uneasily into the Inn, uttering shrill barks over its shoulder; people came out of doorways, stared at the van, and turning on their heels abruptly vanished. That foreign thing which had come into the village, had brought with it changes as subtle as the play of light.

The old gypsy stood with his arms leaning on the shaft, whistling and filling a pipe; over against him on the edge of the driving board, sat the child and the baby, flaxen-haired mites with sunburnt faces; both were silent as dolls, and had something doll-like in their looks, as if set out for inspection.

So the ring of children seemed to think, nudging one another and whispering; one or two of the elder girls stretched out their

hands to the baby, and drew them back with frightened giggles.

The boys began to play—familiarity had bred contempt in them already; but the girls stood fascinated, their yellow heads bobbing and twisting, their fingers beckoning or pointing.

The light was softening again, becoming greyer, mysterious; things lost certainty in the gloom, receded and wavered; the fitful glimmer of a window lamp grew steady.

The old gypsy's voice began, clear and persuasive, talking to the children. Up the street a concertina had started "Rule Britannia" in polka time; there were sounds of scuffling and dancing; two voices were raised in the courtyard of the Inn.

A cart came rattling out between the dim houses. A dog barked; the voices of the boys at play grew shriller; there broke out the wailing of a baby, and the skirl of a concertina rising and falling. A woman came out scolding, and dragged two of the girls away:

"What d'yu want with gypsies then? Yu pair o' fules."

A group of men surged in a doorway, voluble, laughing; their faces mere blurs, and the bowls of their pipes glowing and sending forth a splutter of sparks. Across the bluish darkness the house-lamps threw out their fan-shaped gleams. In one of them the heads of the old gypsy and the two children were outlined ruddy and gold-coloured against the grim cavern of the van.

Then, as if starting from the earth, the forms of the two women reappeared; the old gypsy withdrew his arms from the shaft, there was a confused mutter, a rapid stir, a girl's uneasy laugh; the old horse gave a jerk forward—the van moved. In front, dragging at the horse's bridle, the bent figure of the gypsy girl slipped, dark and noiseless, into the night; with a heavy rumbling the black van disappeared.

There was a sound like a sigh in the street, a patter of footsteps. A man yawned slowly, another called:

"Yu mind that ther', wull'ee?"

A pipe was knocked out against wood with a sharp tap.

"Waal, mebbe yure raight. 'Tis main 'ot zurely—gude avenin'."

"Gude naight, Wellium."

"Gude naight."

"Yu'le tak' the ole 'arse then?"

"That's as mebbe—waal, gude naight."

"Gude naight."

The sound of voices and receding footsteps yielded to a hush, soft and deep as the blackness of the harvest night. The scent of the freshening earth filled all the drowsy air; a faint breeze like the passing of a spirit went shivering through the village.

A dim form stood noiseless in the street, listening to the concertina drawling out the last notes of "Home, Sweet Home." One by one the fan-shaped splashes flickered off the walls; blackness took their place.

1900.

A REVERSION TO TYPE

WE sat smoking after dinner in a country house. Some one was saying: "They're either too conceited, too much in earnest, too much after advertisement, too effeminate, or too dirty—I never found literary men amusing."

There was a murmur of approval, till a sallow man who had not spoken all the evening, except to ask for matches, emerged from the shadow of his chair . . .

"You're wrong," he said. "The most diverting thing I ever came across was in connection with two literary men. It happened some years ago at an Italian inn, in a place where there were ruins. I was travelling with poor B——, and at that inn we came across a literary man, a regular Classicist, looking up items for an historical romance. He was very good company—a prosperous, clever, satirical creature, who wore a mous-

tache, and thought it wicked not to *change* for dinner. In spite of this he had his limitations —but we all have *them*, even we sitting here. This inn was a queer place—at a crossing of two roads in the midst of brown hills—with blistered eucalyptus trees throwing ragged shadows on it, and two old boar-spears fastened up over the door. We were the only people there, and it was very hot. We used to dine outside the entrance, in the shade of the eucalyptus trees. There was a wonderful tap of wine; and after toiling over ruins in the sun all day, we used to punish it—the Classicist especially; it sharpened his wit and thickened his tongue. He was a man of culture, great believer in physical sports, and knew all about everybody's ancestors—was, himself, fifteen degrees removed from a murderer of Thomas A'Becket, and a friend of the champion tennis-player. We got on very well; he was quite amusing and affable.

"It was about sunset on the fourth evening when the other literary person turned up. He came just as we were going to dinner—a long, weedy fellow, slouching in under a knapsack,

covered with dust, in a battered 'larrikin' hat, unshaved, with eyes as keen as sword-points, a lot of hair, and an emotional mouth, like a girl's. He sprawled down on a bench close to our table, unslung his pack, and appeared to lose himself in the sunset. When our host came out with the soup, he asked for wine and a bed. B—— suggested that he should join us; he accepted, and sat down forthwith. I sat at one end, B—— opposite; this fellow and the Classicist, who wore a smoking jacket, and smelt tremendously of soap, faced each other. From the first moment it was a case of 'two of a trade.' The moment their eyes met, ironical smiles began wandering about their mouths. There was little enough talk till we had broached our third bottle. The Classicist was a noble drinker; this wild man of the ways a nobler, or perhaps more thirsty. I remember the first words they exchanged. The Classicist, in his superior, thick, satirical voice, was deploring 'the unmanly tricks' introduced nowadays into swordsmanship, to the detriment of its dignity and grace.

" 'It would be interesting to know, sir,'

said the other, 'when you're fighting for life, what is the good of those "tickle points of niceness"?' The Classicist looked at him: " 'You would wish, I should imagine, to "play the game," sir?'

" 'With my enemy's sword through the middle of me?'

"The Classicist answered: 'I should have thought it a matter of "good form"; however, if you don't feel that—of course——'

" 'I have not the good fortune to be a swordsman; but if I were, I should be concerned to express my soul with the point of my sword, not with attitudes.'

" 'Noble aspiration!'

" 'Just as I drink off at a draught this most excellent wine.'

" 'Evidently you are not concerned with flavour?'

" 'Its flavour, sir, is the feeling it gives me —Burn Academy, and all its works!'

"The Classicist turned to me elaborately and asked:

" 'Do you know young D——, the author of ——? You ought to; there's no d—d

nonsense about *him*.' The man on the other side of the table laid his soiled hand on his soiled chest. 'A hit. I feel honoured.'

"The Classicist continued his remarks. 'No "expressions of soul" and that sort of thing about D——!'

" 'Oh! happy D——!' murmured our visitor. 'And is the happy D—— an artist in his writings?'

"The Classicist turned and rent him. 'He's a public school man, sir, and a gentleman, which, in my humble opinion, is much better.'

"The newcomer drank. 'That is very interesting. I must read D——. Has he given us any information about the inner meaning of life in public schools?'

" 'No, sir, he is not a prig.'

" 'Indeed! He must have English blood in him, this gentleman!'

" 'He knows the meaning of "good form" anyway.'

"Our visitor clutched his glass and shook it in the air. 'Sir,' he said, 'with all my heart, with all my blood, I revolt against those words

"good form"; I revolt against the commercial snobbery that underlies them; I revolt against the meanness and the Pharisaism of them; I revolt——' and still he went on shaking his glass and saying 'I revolt.'

"The Classicist ironically murmured: '*Sparge rosas! Inania verba!*'

" 'No, sir; "winged words," that I will drive home with my last breath.'

"The Classicist smiled: 'An Emotional,' he began, 'an Emotional . . .'

"Gentlemen, it was time to interfere, so I upset the bottle. The wine streamed across the table. We ordered more. Darkness had gathered; the moon was rising; over the door the reflections of those old boar-spears branched sharp and long on the pale wall; they had an uncanny look, like cross-bones. How those two fellows disliked each other! Whole centuries of antagonism glared out of their eyes. They seemed to sum up in some mysterious way all that's significant and opposed in the artist and the man of action. It was exceedingly funny. They were both learned pigs. But the ancestors of the one might from time

immemorable have been burning and stamping on the other, and the ancestors of the other stabbing desperately up at the one. One represented a decent well-fed spirit of satisfaction with things as they are, and the other a ravening shade, whom centuries of starvation had engrained with strife. For all I know they may both have been the sons of chemists. But anyway, some instinct made each recognise the other as typical of what he had most cause to hate. Very obscure the reasons of such things—very obscure everything to do with origins!

"We ordered another bottle. Any other two men, having discovered such hostility, would have held their tongues; these couldn't —I have noticed it with members of their profession. The Emotionalist proposed a toast: 'I give you,' he said, 'the country most immersed in the slough of commercialism, the country that suffocates truth in its cradle with the smell of money, the country of snobs and stockjobbers!' He drank his own toast with enthusiasm; needless to say, nobody else did. The Classicist showed the first signs of excite-

ment. 'I give you,' he responded, 'the whipping of all high-falutin' upstarts!'

" 'Good!' replied the other; 'I drink that too!' It again became necessary to upset something—a glass this time. Presently we tumbled somehow on the subject of the Sagas. Gentlemen, the Sagas were deep in the affections of both those fellows; and nothing could have better roused their hostility to boiling-point than this common affection. You could see it by their faces. To the one a Saga was the quintessence of sport, of manly valour, and aristocratic tyranny; to the other something lawless and beautiful, freedom in a mist of primitive emotions, a will-o'-the-wisp hovering over bogs, a draught of blood and wine.

"Have you ever noticed two men discussing a picture, a book, a person, which one loves and the other hates? What happens? Indifference or mutual contempt—nothing more. But let them chance on that which each loves; then you may cry 'havoc!'

"We left our chairs, and stood about, and in the moonlight those creatures talked. First one went to the table and drained his glass,

then the other. Their words were as bitter as bitter, they kept closing and hastily recoiling. They were like two men defending the honour of some woman who belonged to both of them—a priceless possession, which neither would abandon to the other. So, in the age of Sagas, a forbear of the one, some wild heathman, may have hewn a lord in sunder; or, in a foray, the other's ancestor trodden into the earth a turbulent churl. It was being done over again that evening—with words—by two lights of our high civilisation. B—— went to sleep. I woke him, and we left them disputing in the moonlight.

"And now, gentlemen, I come to the diverting part of my story. It may have been a quarter, it may have been half an hour after B—— and I had retired, when the landlord came to call us.

"There, in a pool of moonlight, shadows, blood, and wine, they lay—they had carved each other up with the boar-spears.

"The Classicist was quite dead, with a sneer on his face; the Emotionalist still lived, with a gash right through his chest. There

was nothing to be learnt from him, however; before his death he fixed his eyes on me. I bent, thinking to hear words of remorse or terror. But all he said was:

" 'The snob!' and died.

"They took alarm at the inn and wanted to smother it up. They called it fever. Well, gentlemen, so it *was:* the ineradicable fever of type. A good many years ago. You must have seen it in the papers. . . ."

The sallow man was silent.

1901.

A WOMAN

A TRAVELLER was writing to his friend: . . . "We were sitting on the *stoep*. Above the pines the long line of Table Mountain was like a violet shadow two shades deeper than the sky. We had no light except the 'Cross,' and a swarm of other stars; it was a rare night, dark crystal.

"There had been a dance, and the girls had gone to bed; all the shutters were closed, the old house against our backs looked very silent, and flat, and long. Only the door was open, and we sat round it. The sparks from our pipes writhed about in the air, or, falling on to the *stoep* expired like the words dropping from our mouths. You know the kind of talk. In the morning we had played cricket amongst the trees—a hit into the vineyards, 'five and out'—girls and all. In the afternoon we had played tennis, on a half-made court—the girls too. In the evening we had danced. Some

had hitched up, and departed. Some had gone to bed. We four were left, and old Juno, the pointer, with her head on her paws, and her nose wrinkling at the squeaking of some tiny beast in the darkness. Little Byng, with his waistcoat unbuttoned, was sitting quite square above his parted legs; round-faced little man, no neck to speak of, straw-coloured hair, and eyes without lashes, just like a dissipated egg. You know him, Billy Byng, best-hearted little man, they say, in Cape Colony. Young Sanley—married to one of the Detwell girls, sleeping a healthy sleep already indoors—such a neat, smooth chap; great Scott! yes, and how commonplace! with his pale moustache, and his high white forehead, and his slim nose, and his well-cut clothes, and his tidy made-up tie. And our host—you know him; a little too alert, a little too dark, a little too everything, but a right good fellow; engaged to the other Detwell girl, who was perhaps thinking of him, and perhaps wasn't, in her bed just over our heads. Well, we were talking; profaning things a bit; not much, you know, couldn't lay claim to

original profanity; just tarbrushing the surface. We were all a bit bored, rather sleepy, and accordingly, just a little too jovial. Even Juno, who's at least as wise as any human, was pondering somewhat gloomily over her master's intention of taking us to shoot pheasants at daybreak—'before it was too hot.' We had been there before; we knew it—that pheasant shooting, up stony slopes in a tangle of cover, with the chance of a couple of shots, at most, producing one disembowelled bird. Every now and then one of us would get up, walk to the edge of the *stoep*, stare into the dark vineyard, stretch as if he were going to make a move, and after all yield to our host's: 'Just one more, boys!'

"All of a sudden young Sanley murmured:

" 'I heard footsteps.'

" 'Some nigger,' said our host.

"And then at the far end of the *stoep* a woman appeared, walked straight into our midst, and sat down. It was pretty startling, and absurd. Little Byng seemed absolutely transfixed, he blinked his lashless eyes, and seemed to twitch all over his face. San-

ley got very pale and nervously tapped the table. Our host alone kept the use of his tongue.

" 'Corrie!' he said.

" 'Why not? Give me a drink, Jack Allen.'

"Our host in a kind of surreptitious way, poured brandy into a glass and added seltzer.

"The woman held out her hand for it, and as she tilted her chin to drink, the cloak fell from her shoulders, and we could see her neck and arms gleaming, out of her evening dress.

" 'Thanks!' she said; 'I wanted that.' Then she bent over the table and leaned her face on her hand. Well, no one spoke, and we all cast secret looks back at the house. Sanley reached out his hand quietly and drew the door to.

"The woman said:

" 'I saw the bowls of your pipes, and heard your voices. You're not too lively now.'

"Her voice wasn't loud; but it sounded wilfully coarsened. Her lips were slightly parted above her forefinger crooked across her chin. Her nostrils seemed to broaden as she looked at us, in a sort of distrustful way. She

wore no hat, and her hair was like a little black patch of the night over her brow. Her eyes; how can I describe them? They seemed to see everything, and to see nothing. They were so intent, and mournful, and defiant; hard, if you like, tragic, too. I remembered, now, where I had met her—though I hadn't been ten days in the Colony—at the supper party of a man called Brown, after the theatre; very vulgar and noisy.

"The most notorious woman in Cape Town! Her house had been pointed out to me, too, just at the corner of the Malay quarter; a little house, painted mauve, with large, red flowers starring its front.

"The most notorious woman in Cape Town! I looked at our host. He was biting his fingers. At Byng. His mouth was a little open, as if he were about to make a very sage remark. Sanley struck me as looking altogether too pitiably decent.

"Our host broke the silence.

" 'How? Where? Eh! What?'

" 'Staying down there at Charlie Lennard's; what a beast! Oh! what a beast!'

"Her eyes rested, wistfully it seemed to me, on each of us in turn.

" 'It's a beautiful night, isn't it?' she said.

"Little Byng kicked out his foot, as if he would have sent something sprawling, and began stuttering out:

" 'I beg pardon—I beg pardon.' I saw the old pointer thrust her nose against the woman's knees. Something moved, back in the house; we all looked round with a start. Then the woman began to laugh, almost noiselessly, as though she had an unholy understanding of our minds, as if she would never leave off. I saw Sanley tear at his hair, and stealthily smooth it down again. Our host frowned horribly, and thrust his hands so deep into his pockets, that it seemed to me they must go through the linings. Little Byng almost bounded up and down in his chair. Then just as suddenly, the woman stopped laughing; there was dead silence. You could only hear the squeaking of the tiny beast. At last the woman said:

" 'Doesn't it smell good to-night; it's quiet, too. . . . Here! let me have another drink!'

She took the glass our host held out: 'Your very good health,' she said, 'my respectable friends!'

"Our host suddenly resumed his seat, crossed his arms and sighed. A pitiful little noise he made of it.

" 'I'm not going to hurt you,' she said, 'I wouldn't hurt a fly to-night—It smells like home. Look!' She held out the edge of her skirts to us. 'Dew! I'm dripping; isn't it sweet?'

"Her voice had lost all coarseness—it might have been your mother or sister speaking; it was ever so queer, and little Byng sputtered out: 'Too bad! too bad!' but whether to her, or of her, or to us—no one knew.

" 'I've walked miles to-night,' she said. 'Haven't had such a walk since I was a girl.' There was a kind of tone in her voice that hurt me horribly; and suddenly young Sanley rose.

" 'Excuse me, Allen!' he stammered: 'it's very late. Going to turn in?' I caught the gleam of his eyes on the woman.

" 'Oh! are you going?' she said. There was a sort of regret, a sort of something inno-

cent and unconscious in her voice, that seemed regularly to pierce a bag of venom in that smooth young man.

" 'Madam, I am. May I ask why you came here? My wife——' He stopped, groped for the door, pulled it open, smiled his mean tidy smile and vanished.

"The woman had risen, and she gave a sort of laugh.

" '*His wife!* Oh! Well, I wish her happiness. Ah! my God! I *do* wish her happiness —I *do;* and yours, Jack Allen; and yours, if you have one. Billy Byng, you remember me —you remember when I first—to-night, I thought—I thought——' She hid her face. One by one we slunk off the *stoep,* and left her, sobbing her heart out before the house.

"God knows what she was thinking of! God knows what sort of things lurk round us, and leap out—thank Heaven! not often—from the darkness, as that did!

"I crept back later to the edge of the vineyard.

"There she was still, and, beside her, little Byng, with his toes turned out, bending over

her fingers. Then I saw him draw them under his arm; pat them with his other hand and gazing up at the sky, lead her gently out into the darkness." . .

1900.

THE "CODGER"

IF ever there were a personality in petticoats, this was he. His petticoats were nine inches long, but what he lacked in petticoats he made up in personality. On board the ship he was known by the name of the "Codger." Why? Man does not know—unless that he walked very wide behind, had a bunchy appearance, and an air of pugnacity. His name was Ferdinand, but his parents called him "baby"; and we called him the "Codger."

We sailed westwards two months to the Cape; for the most part we made fair weather, and in fair weather he was let loose upon the deck, to stagger by, or stand between one's legs. You looked him over, he looked you over in return, and it was certain that his estimate was no more flattering than your own; you could not get the better of the "Codger."

Instead of gambling on the ship's run, it was the daily custom to gamble on how many times he would cry in the course of the day. The lowest ticket was numbered ten, and the highest forty. One hot, calm day, when there was nothing else for him to do, the number thirty-seven won; in rough weather, low numbers took the prize—he liked watching the big waves, and lived contentedly in the scuppers, into which he continually rolled. He refused to weep when he was hurt; he wept from temper, or a sense of his own importance. He was a "fine" boy, and celebrated his third birthday during the voyage. Old "Andy," the sailmaker, was prepared to wager that he would "whip" his brother Freddie, who was rising five.

He did not talk much, the "Codger," he kept his lungs for other things; nor was he, as far as we could see, "a beggar to think"; but we were proud of him, hungering to match him against any child of his age and weight, if such an one could be found.

If a person looked at him, to take stock, at the top he discovered a stiff mop of golden-

brown curls like a number of small, fat corkscrews, a broad forehead ornamented with tumblebumps, a pair of defiant grey eyes, stout, rosy cheeks, a snub nose, a genially thick, red mouth—wide open, some teeth, a double chin, plenty of freckles, and an expression of devil-may-care resentment; below, he found a bundle, blue or holland-coloured, and a pair of fat and well-scarred legs. I never saw him afraid of anything; I never saw him docile; his mother doted on him, while he led his father, a small man, the life of a dog; he was frequently chastised, with as much effect as if one had chastised a leg of mutton. On occasions that surpassed he was handed over to the grey-whiskered, thick-lipped Captain, and smacked in solemn conclave, from which ordeal he would emerge rather sore, but a greater personality than ever. He rarely kept his feet for more than two minutes at a time, and he would bang with his fists the deck or anything that tripped him up. Indeed, when he was not pleased, he was a terror. In common with the other children he took his meals with us at the long dining-table that stretched down

the centre of the saloon like a multiplied ironing board. And a fine, free feeder he was! What did not go into his mouth went over his shoulder or into his neighbour's lap. He sat between his nurse, an acidulated, red-haired person, and the second mate, the only being he respected. It was indeed quite remarkable to see the influence that fellow had over the "Codger"; there was nothing he could not do with him. The "Codger" knew that he too had been a "Codger" in his time, they were doubtless hall-marked to each other like freemasons. Yes, the second mate was Emperor of the "Codger"; he could even induce him to eat sago pudding, beyond which man's power cannot go. This second mate was bluff and young, with a ruddy face, and a fair moustache; and he would sit silent, next to the "Codger," grave as a judge, and, when the latter went astray, tap him on the head with a dessert spoon. It was, then, instructive to watch the "Codger," brought up all standing, gaze with an expression of resigned astonishment at the third brass button on the mate's coat. There was much quiet fun at that end of the table.

But we never considered that the "Codger" truckled to the second mate; if he crawled about after him on his hands and knees, it was merely felt that it gave tone to the second mate, making him one man in a ship's company; so that we became proud of him.

One day, coming on deck, I saw the bare-legged "Codger," a stout wisp of holland clothes, swimming, as it seemed, up the mizen-rigging. Below him the second mate, with his hand twisted securely in the middle of the wisp, mounted, slowly, steadily. The "Codger" was crowing, the second mate smiling, and down below stood the acidulated nurse.

We owed many things to the "Codger"; he was a medium for speculation, a thing to argue about, the whetstone of our tongues, the source of groans, a cause for laughter; in calm or in storm, running free, or while sails flapped, his personality was immovable, a thing of specific gravity, a little bit of ballast. To this day I remember how, in the tail of a cyclone round the "Leeuwin," when the ship was groaning, one's cabin chaos, one's heart in one's boots, the sound, surmounting the gale,

of the "Codger" being smacked in the next cabin came and soothed one with a sense of home and the eternal fitness of things . . .

He must be grown up now, pursuing some path of life open to "codgers" in commerce, Church or State, and radiating that atmosphere of calm insuperable "tuskiness" peculiar to his breed.

In any walk abroad he may be seen, on any journey, in almost every office, on some Benches, in many pulpits, drays, and ships—with his teeth bared as it were for the seizing of the next matter in hand; very stolid, cheerful, ready to bite, and seldom biting; with his hair a little rumpled, a slight roll in his gait, and his full grey eye staring you out of countenance. Jolly companion, hearty friend, good slow enemy and fighter, quite incapable of seeing the thumbs of the spectators turned down on him; or of understanding how he can possibly be subject-matter for a smile.

One of the old breed, almost Dutch; finding his facts as large as life, and hating an idea like poison.

Long may he roll with us in the old barque

on the great voyage over the green seas of history. For while we have him, Fate will never enter us at Lloyd's: "Lost," for fear that he should rise from the waves, and staring at Her fixedly with his blue eye, call Her liar; being damp and angry, and having refused to see that he was drowned.

1900.

FOR EVER

THERE came the sound of singing from the forepart of the emigrant train, of patriotic songs in half-drunken voices. The guards consulted their watches; the great Paddington clock recorded fourteen minutes of a new day.

The carpenter looked at me.

"It'sh too bad of them," he said.

The hand of the clock crept towards the quarter, the guards began closing the doors, the carpenter climbed back into his carriage; his pale, round face wore a very blank and dismal look.

"I'll 'ave to go alone, it seems," he said.

Suddenly, at the end of the long platform, a little crowd of men and women appeared, running. The soldier first, then Henry Augustus, very white and out of breath; they scrambled in as the train began to move.

"All along," said Henry Augustus, "o' what we calls a glass o' trouble, sir."

The train gathered speed; the waving caps of the soldiers' pals, the face of Henry Augustus's wife, the red hat of her woman friend, faded from our gaze. The carpenter did not look back—he had no one to look back for.

When, after that night in the train, I went to look at the three "out o' works" at Chester Station, they were already sitting up; the soldier and the carpenter back to the engine, Henry Augustus opposite, perfuming the air with his clay pipe. The soldier pointed to the carpenter, and said with a cheerful smile: "All right, sir, our friend's been lookin' after us."

The carpenter smiled weakly; an odour of whisky was wafted from him.

"I been blowin' the fog-horn of the steamer all night," said Henry Augustus; his eyes, with the little red rings round the edges of the iris, looked quite dead in the early light; his fish-white face was contorted in a grin; he pointed his pipe at the carriage window: "Wot price Canada, now?"

It had been bitterly cold that night; the snow was drifted thick and soft into the hollows

along the line; on the roofs of the houses at Port Sunlight it was like white thatching with blunted ends; there was the hush, too, in the air that comes only with heavy snow; and above it all a wonderful, thick, soft, icy sky, torn into opal shreds by the sun.

Half an hour later we had run into Birkenhead, and were filing down to the ferry amongst the crowd of quiet emigrants. The carpenter in his long coat, carrying a brown rug and his straw tool-bag, sewn up with string, walked in front with a solemn air, as though his legs had been tied on to his somewhat protruding stomach, and he knew that he must move them carefully. He stared ahead with round, blue eyes, above his flabby cheeks, exhaling at every step the perfume of his night's debauch. By my side came the soldier, thrusting his face a little forward, prematurely grizzled, high-coloured, high-cheekboned, with eyes that from staring at great spaces and at death had acquired a peculiar glittering light. Behind, his lips raised jeeringly above his blackened teeth, with his coat unbuttoned and his tie screwed round under the flap collar of his

flannel shirt, lurched Henry Augustus, at his care-for-nobody gait.

A quarter of a mile away, on the grey, gleaming water, was the bulky one-funnelled steamer, with shreds of the night's snow-wrap still clinging to her.

Articulating his words with difficulty, the carpenter spoke:

"Well, she'll 'ave us in an hour or two."

We turned to look at the inanimate monster so soon to swallow up those hundreds on hundreds of men; and, from behind, the voice of Henry Augustus added:

"It's to be 'oped we'll never 'ave to be brought 'ome again."

We crossed the river and set off into the town for breakfast, the carpenter and I in front.

"It all seems like a dream to me," he said; and the odour of his whisky enveloped me like a blessing. The door, the passage, the staircase, the one small dining-room of the little hotel were all crowded with emigrants; bearded men, boys, women, babies, sitting round the one long table, or leaning against the walls, waiting for their turns.

A spectacled woman of middle age, with an absent expression and infrequent smiles, was pouring tea out of a huge tin can into coarse, round cups; she gave orders in a sour voice to two small, red-cheeked slaveys, who bore up and down plates of eggs and bacon. Neither round the long table nor in the passage nor on the stairs was there any sound of talking. An uncanny patience, a long strange silence brooded over all; the loud crying of a baby, the continual rattle of the plates alone broke that silence. There was no room for us all to sit together, but Henry Augustus and I found places side by side. We were served with plates of eggs and bacon, slices of stale bread, cuts of pallid butter, cups of washy tea. Henry Augustus took knife and fork, set them akimbo to his plate, poured half the contents of a vinegar bottle over his eggs, for a long time neither ate nor spake, then suddenly began:

"I'm a-going to do what I can out there; and if I get on I'm goin' to send you such a letter as'll open your eyes a bit. You don't know my character—I've got a bad name, but a lot o' the black that's on me's a-comin' off."

He breathed hard; and his breath, that smelt like the breath of a furnace, smoked in little puffs from his mouth, as though in truth there were a fire alight within him; then slowly he began to eat.

"No, sir," he repeated in a surlier voice, "you don't know me. I never turned my back on a chance yet. I'm a-goin' for ever," he gave me a strange, slow look out of his dead eyes.

The carpenter came up. "We can't get a smell of anything over there," he said querulously. The spectacled woman turned on him at once: "Your turn'll come in a minute." The carpenter went meekly back to his seat, fixing his eyes before him and manœuvring his legs with care. The baby that had been shaken into silence again began to cry. A boy in a half-bred livery, with a Pompeian face, came in suddenly and announced that the "break" for the landing-stage was at the door.

Some of the emigrants got up; their places were at once taken by others.

"I'm a man that mixes with men," began Henry Augustus again, slowly masticating ba-

con, with his eyes fixed on his plate; "but I've brought up my children to answer to that," he held up his black-nailed finger. "I'm respected as a father all through Notting Dale, I am. An' all what my wife'll tell you about black eyes and cut throats, well—my letter'll throw another light on that." He made a movement of the fork in his hand, and looked at me, as though with those words he had relieved his soul. "They'll 'ave to bring me back dead if they wants to; I'm a-goin' for ever, and I 'ope where I'm goin' I'll get more to eat than wot I've been gettin' 'ere." He grinned, and in a lighter vein began to tell me of occasions on which he had been bolder than other men. On the far side of the room the carpenter and soldier were devouring their breakfast at a tremendous rate.

The Pompeian boy returned. "Any more for the 'break'?" he said in his squeaky voice. We four went out and took the last three places. The carpenter was obliged to stand, holding to the roof. A little town urchin ran along behind, bare-footed, through the snow. Henry Augustus jerked his thumb: "A pair o'

boots wouldn't come amiss to 'im," he said; and all the drive he went on cracking jokes in a thick voice, but no one else joined in.

The tender put off just as we arrived, and, standing in the slush at the edge of the shelter-shed, we waited a long time for her return. The sun was shining; along the riverside small boats were outlined white in thick bright snow, and every now and then a gull swooped out of the icy sky and swept alone above the wide grey river.

The knots of emigrants kept multiplying round us. There was no animation, no hurry, no eagerness, no grief. A strange long patience was on them all. One man alone, a bearded Irishman, seemed to have a grievance, which he vented from time to time in a hard, creaking voice. Close to us a grey-haired father stood quite silent beside his stolid, insensible, red-cheeked boy. Behind them a family were gathered in a little circle round a young woman with a baby; and seated under the shed two comely, black-eyed girls, in patched black skirts, with their mittened hands in their laps, were staring sulkily before them.

The carpenter began asking us conundrums. The soldier said with a laugh, "You don't seem very low!" The carpenter answered, "Must 'ave something to keep our spirits up." Henry Augustus joined in; he knew as many conundrums as the carpenter, but the carpenter's were of better quality. The soldier remained silent, turning his eyes from side to side; the expression on his face was that of a man whose thoughts are far away; he stood a little apart, only now and then joining in our laughter.

"And what's mortar do between bricks?" asked the carpenter.

"Sticks 'em together," replied Henry Augustus.

"Wrong," said the carpenter; "keeps 'em apart!"

Out on the water puffs of steam wreathed out along the ship's side; the tender was starting back towards us. The crowd of emigrants thickened, but still there was neither hurry, eagerness, nor grief; only two youths, close to us on the right, began to chaff each other coarsely.

The grey-haired father said to his boy: "Take your place, Jo."

Faster came the carpenter's conundrums, as though he were pouring forth his swan song before for ever being dumb. Faster came Henry Augustus's thick retorts. The soldier's eyes turned faster from side to side, but still they seemed to look at nothing. They saw, perhaps, four small children in Industrial Schools, and a wife who was "on the streets." They saw that London which he had scoured for work, its lights flaring on the open stalls, its long close rows of houses shut against him, its parks where he had flung him down to rest. And yet from side to side the eyes turned as though greedy of this last look before for ever they lost sight. A fine sleet had begun to fall.

Suddenly Henry Augustus said in his jeering voice: " 'Ere she comes."

The carpenter gazed at me and smiled; there was moisture in his eyes, and behind that moisture the very soul of him seemed to be looking forth. The soldier caught my hand in a feverish grip. Henry Augustus glanced slowly round with his dead-fish eyes. "Leavin' old England, for ever," he said.

There was a minute for hurried handshakes,

then one behind the other they took their places. So closely packed, so many hundreds, so silent—long were they passing the ticket inspector on the plank. No hurry, no eagerness, no animation, no grief; the long strange patience on them all.

The tender whistled, and, one by one, those hundreds of faces turned in the sunlight and the sleet towards the shore. No joy, no grief, no cry, no cheer; in that weird silence they slipped away.

1906.

THE CONSUMMATION

ABOUT 1889 there lived in London a man named Harrison, of an amiable and perverse disposition. One morning, at Charing Cross Station, a lady in whom he was interested said to him:

"But Mr. Harrison, why don't you *write?* You are just the person!"

Harrison saw that he was, and at the end of two years had produced eleven short stories, with two of which he was not particularly pleased, but as he naturally did not like to waste them, he put them with the others and sent them all to a publisher. In the course of time he received from the publisher a letter saying that for a certain consideration or commission he would be prepared to undertake the risk of publishing these stories upon Harrison's incurring all the expenses. This pleased Harrison who, feeling that no time should be wasted in making his "work" public, wrote

desiring the publisher to put the matter in hand. The publisher replied to this with an estimate and an agreement, to which Harrison responded with a cheque. The publisher answered at once with a polite letter, suggesting that for Harrison's advantage a certain additional sum should be spent on advertisements. Harrison saw the point of this directly, and replied with another cheque—knowing that between gentlemen there could be no question of money.

In due time the book appeared. It was called "In the Track of the Stars," by Cuthbert Harrison; and within a fortnight Harrison began to receive reviews. He read them with an extraordinary pleasure, for they were full of discriminating flattery. One asked if he were a "Lancelot in disguise." Two Liberal papers described the stories as masterpieces; one compared them to the best things in Poe and de Maupassant; and another called him a second Rudyard Kipling. He was greatly encouraged, but, being by nature modest, he merely wrote to the publisher inquiring what he thought of a second edition. His publisher

replied with an estimate, mentioning casually that he had already sold about four hundred copies. Harrison referred to his cheque book and saw that the first edition had been a thousand copies. He replied, therefore, that he would wait. He waited, and at the end of six months wrote again. The publisher replied that he had now sold four hundred and three copies, but that, as Mr. Harrison had at present an unknown name, he did not advise a second edition: there was no market for short stories. These had, however, been so well received that he recommended Mr. Harrison to write a long story. The book was without doubt a success, so far as a book of short stories could ever be a success. . . . He sent Harrison a small cheque, and a large number of reviews which Harrison had already received.

Harrison decided not to have a second edition, but to rest upon his *succès d'estime.* All his relations were extremely pleased, and almost immediately he started writing his long story. Now it happened that among Harrison's friends was a man of genius, who sent Harrison a letter.

"I had no idea," he said, "that you could

write like this; of course, my dear fellow, the stories are not 'done'; there is no doubt about it, they are *not* 'done.' But you have plenty of time; you are young, and I see that you can do things. Come down here and let us have a talk about what you are at now."

On receiving this Harrison wasted no time, but went down. The man of genius, over a jug of claret-cup, on a summer's afternoon, pointed out how the stories were not "done."

"They show a feeling for outside drama," said he, "but there is none of the real drama of psychology."

Harrison showed him his reviews. He left the man of genius on the following day with a certain sensation of soreness. In the course of a few weeks, however, the soreness wore off, and the words of the man of genius began to bear fruit, and at the end of two months Harrison wrote:

"You are quite right—the stories were not 'done.' I think, however, that I am now on the right path."

At the end of another year, after submitting it once or twice to the man of genius, he fin-

ished his second book, and called it "John Endacott." About this time he left off alluding to his "work" and began to call his writings "stuff."

He sent it to the publisher with the request that he would consider its publication on a royalty. In rather more than the ordinary course of time the publisher replied, that in his opinion (a lay one) "John Endacott" didn't quite fulfil the remarkable promise of Mr. Harrison's first book; and, to show Harrison his perfect honesty, he enclosed an extract from the "reader's" opinion, which stated that Mr. Harrison had "fallen between the stools of art and the British public." Much against the publisher's personal feelings, therefore, the publisher considered that he could only undertake the risk in the then bad condition of trade—if Mr. Harrison would guarantee the expenses.

Harrison hardened his heart, and replied that he was not prepared to guarantee the expenses. Upon which the publisher returned his manuscript, saying that in his opinion (a lay one) Mr. Harrison was taking the wrong

turning, which he (the publisher) greatly regretted, for he had much appreciated the pleasant relations which had always existed between them.

Harrison sent the book to a younger publisher who accepted it on a postponed royalty. It appeared.

At the end of three weeks Harrison began to receive reviews. They were mixed. One complained that there was not enough plot; another, fortunately by the same post, that there was too much plot. The general tendency was to regret that the author of "In the Track of the Stars" had not fulfilled the hopes raised by his first book, in which he had shown such promise of completely hitting the public taste. This might have depressed Harrison had he not received a letter from the man of genius couched in these terms:

"My dear fellow, I am more pleased than I can say. I am now more than ever convinced that you can do things."

Harrison at once began a third book.

Owing to the unfortunate postponement of his royalty he did not receive anything from

his second book. The publisher sold three hundred copies. During the period (eighteen months) that he was writing his third book the man of genius introduced Harrison to a critic, with the words: "You may rely on his judgment; the beggar is infallible."

While to the critic he said: "I tell you, this fellow can do things."

The critic was good to Harrison, who, as before said, was of an amiable disposition.

When he had finished his third book he dedicated it to the man of genius and called it "Summer."

"My dear fellow," wrote the man of genius, when he received his copy, "it is *good!* There is no more to be said about it; it *is* good! I read it with indescribable pleasure."

On the same day Harrison received a letter from the critic which contained the following: "Yes, it's undoubtedly an advance. It's not quite Art, but it's a great advance!"

Harrison was considerably encouraged. The same publisher brought out the book, and sold quite two hundred copies; but he wrote rather dolefully to Harrison, saying that the

public demand seemed "almost exhausted." Recognising the fact that comparisons are odious, Harrison refrained from comparing the sale of the book with that of "In the Track of the Stars," in which he had shown such promise of "completely hitting the public taste." Indeed, about this time he began to have dreams of abandoning the sources of his private income and living the true literary life. He had not many reviews, and began his fourth book.

He was two years writing this "work," which he called "A Lost Man" and dedicated to the critic. He sent a presentation copy to the man of genius, from whom he received an almost immediate reply:

"My dear fellow, it is amazing, really amazing how you progress! Who would ever imagine you were the same man that wrote 'In the Track of the Stars'? yet I pique myself on the fact that even in your first book I spotted that you could do things. Ah!—I wish I could write like you! 'A Lost Man' is wonderfully good."

The man of genius was quite sincere in these

remarks, which he wrote after perusing the first six chapters. He never, indeed, actually finished reading the book—he felt so tired, as if Harrison had exhausted him—but he always alluded to it as "wonderfully good," just as if he really had finished it.

Harrison sent another copy to the critic, who wrote a genuinely warm letter, saying that he, Harrison, had "achieved" it at last. "This," he said, "is *art*. I doubt if you will ever do anything better than this. . . . I crown you."

Harrison at once commenced his fifth book.

He was more than three years upon this new "work," and called it "A Pilgrimage." There was a good deal of difficulty in getting it published. Two days after it appeared, however, the critic wrote to Harrison: "I cannot tell you," he said, "how very good I think your new book. It is perhaps stronger than 'A Lost Man,' perhaps more original. If anything it is too—I have not finished it yet, but I've written off at once to let you know."

As a matter of fact, he never finished the book. He could not—it was too——! "It's

wonderfully good," he said, however, to his wife, and he made *her* read it.

Meanwhile, the man of genius wired saying: "Am going to write to you about your book. Positively am, but have lumbago and cannot hold pen."

Harrison never received any letter, but the critic received one saying: "Can you read it? *I* can't. Altogether over 'done.' "

Harrison was elated. His new publisher was not. He wrote in a peevish strain, saying there was *absolutely no sale.* Mr. Harrison must take care what he was doing or he would exhaust his public, and enclosing a solitary review, which said amongst other things: "This book may be very fine art, too fine altogether. *We* found it dull."

Harrison went abroad, and began his sixth book. He named it "The Consummation," and worked at it in hermit-like solitude; in it, for the first time, he satisfied himself. He wrote it, as it were, with his heart's blood, with an almost bitter delight. And he often smiled to himself as he thought how with his first book he had so nearly hit the public taste;

and how of his fourth the critic had said: "This is *art.* I doubt if you will ever do anything better than this." How far away they seemed! Ah! *this* book was indeed the "consummation" devoutly to be wished.

In the course of time he returned to England and took a cottage at Hampstead, and there he finished the book. The day after it was finished he took the manuscript and, going to a secluded spot on the top of the Heath, lay down on the grass to read it quietly through. He read three chapters, and, putting the remainder down, sat with his head buried in his hands.

"Yes," he thought, "I *have* done it at last. *It is good,* wonderfully good!" and for two hours he sat like that, with his head in his hands. He had indeed exhausted his public. It was *too* good—*he could not read it himself!*

Returning to his cottage, he placed the manuscript in a drawer. He never wrote another word.

1904.

THE CHOICE

SOME years ago in Chelsea there used to stand at the crossing of a street leading to the Embankment an old man whose living was derived from the cleanliness of boots. In the intervals of plying his broom he could generally be seen seated on an upturned wooden box, talking to an Irish terrier, who belonged to a house near by, and had taken a fancy to him. He was a Cornishman by birth, had been a plumber by trade, and was a cheerful, independent old fellow with ruddy cheeks, grey hair and beard, and little, bright, rather watery, grey eyes. But he was a great sufferer from a variety of ailments. He had gout, and some trouble in his side, and feet that were like barometers in their susceptibility to weather. Of all these matters he would speak to us in a very impersonal and uncomplaining way, diagnosing himself, as it were, for the benefit of his listeners. He was,

it seems, alone in the world, not having of course at that time anything to look forward to in the way of a pension, nor, one fancies, very much to look back on except the death of his near relatives and the decline of the plumbing trade. It had declined him for years, but, even before a long illness ousted him in favour of younger men, he had felt very severely the palpable difference in things. In old days plumbing had been a quiet, steady business, in which you were apparently "on your own, and knew where you were"; but latterly "you had just had to do what the builders told you, and of course they weren't going to make allowances; if you couldn't do the job as fast as a young man—out you went, and there you were." This long illness and the death of his wife coming close together (and sweeping away the last of his savings), had determined him therefore to buy a broom and seek for other occupation. To sweep a crossing was not a profession that he himself would have chosen before all others, still it was "better than the 'house—and you were your own master." The climate in those days not being the most suit-

able for a business which necessitated constant exposure to all elements but that of fire, his ailments were proportionally active; but the one remarkable feature of his perpetual illness was that he was always "better" than he had been. We could not at times help thinking that this continual crescendo of good health should have gradually raised him to a pinnacle of paramount robustness; and it was with a certain disappointment, in the face of his assurances, that we watched him getting, on the contrary, slowly stiffer and feebler, and noted the sure increase of the egg-like deposits, which he would proudly have us remark, about his wrists and fingers.

He was so entirely fixed and certain that he was "going in the river" before he went "in the 'house," that one hesitated to suggest that the time was at hand when he should cease to expose himself all day and every day. He had evidently pondered long and with a certain deep philosophy on this particular subject, and fortified himself by hearsay.

"The 'house ain't for a man that respects himself," he would remark. And, since that

was his conviction, such as respected themselves could not very well beg him to act against it. At the same time, it became increasingly difficult to pass him without wondering how much longer it would be before he finally sought shelter in the element of water, which was so apt to pour down on him day by day.

It is uncertain whether he discussed this matter of the river *versus* the 'house with the dog, to whom he was always talking; but that they shared a certain fellow feeling on the subject of exposure and advancing age is more than probable; for as he would point out: The poor old feller's teeth were going; and the stiffness across his loins was always worse when it was wet. In fact, he was afraid that the old dog was gettin' old! And the dog would sit patiently for an hour at a time looking up at him, trying to find out, perhaps, from his friend's face what a dog should do, when the enemy weighed on him till he could no longer tolerate himself, not knowing, of course, that kindly humans would see to it that he did not suffer more than a dog could bear. On his

face with its grizzled muzzle and rheumy eyes, thus turned up, there was never a sign of debate, it was full of confidence that, whatever decision his friend came to, in this momentous question between the river and the 'house, would be all right, perfectly satisfactory in every way to dogs and men.

One very rainy summer, our old friend in a burst of confidence disclosed the wish of his heart. It was that he might be suffered to go down once more to Fowey in Cornwall, where he had been born, but had not been for fifty years. By some means or other the money was procured for this enterprise, and he was enabled to set off by excursion train for a fortnight's holiday. He was observed the day before his start talking at great length to the dog, and feeding it out of a paper bag with caraway-seed biscuits. A letter was received from him during his absence, observing certain strange laws of caligraphy, and beginning "Honnured Sir and Lady." It was full of an almost passionate description of a regatta, of a certain "Joe Petherick" who had remembered him, of the "luvly weather" and other

sources of his great happiness; and ended "Yours truley obedient." On the fifteenth day he was back at his corner seated on his box in the pouring rain, saying that he was "a different man, ten years younger, and ready to 'go' now, any day"; nor could anything dissuade him from the theory that Heaven had made a special lodgment in our persons on his behalf. But only four days later, the sun being for once in the heavens, he was so long in answering a salutation that we feared he had been visited by some kind of stroke; his old face had lost colour, it seemed stiff, and his eyes had almost disappeared.

Inquiry elicited from him the information that he was better than he had been, but that the dog was dead. They had put it away while he had been gone, and he was afraid that he should miss the "faithful old feller."

"He was very good to me," he said; "always came for a bit of bread or biscuit. And he was company to me; I never knew such a sensible creature." He seemed to think that the dog must have pined during his absence, and that this had accelerated his end by making his

owners think he was more decrepit than he really was.

The death of the dog, and the cold damp autumn that year, told heavily on the old man, but it was not till mid-November that he was noted one morning absent from his post. As he did not reappear his lodging was sought out. It was in a humble street, but the house was neat and clean, and the landlady seemed a good, rough woman. She informed us that our old friend was laid up "with pleurisy and the gouty rheumatics"; that by rights, of course, he ought to be in the infirmary, but she didn't like to turn him out, though where she would get her rent from she didn't know, to say nothing of his food, because she couldn't let him starve while there he was cryin' out with the pain, and no one but herself to turn a hand to him, with his door open at the top of the house, where he could holler for her if he wanted. An awful independent old feller, too, or else she wouldn't hesitate, for that was where he ought to be, and no mistake, not having a soul in the world to close his eyes, and that's what it would come to, though she

would never be surprised if he got up and went out tomorrow, he was that stubborn!

Leaving her to the avocations which we had interrupted by coming in, we went upstairs.

The door of the back room at the top was, as indeed she had led us to suppose, open; and through it the sound of our old friend's voice could be heard, travelling forth:

"O Lord God, that took the dog from me, and gave me this here rheumatics, help me to keep a stiff and contrite heart. I am an old man, O Lord God, and I am not one to go into that *place*. So God give me a stiff heart, and I will remember you in my prayers, for that's about all I can do now, O God. I have been a good one in my time, O Lord, and cannot remember doing harm to any man for a long while now, and I have tried to keep upsides with it; so, good Lord, remember and do not forget me, now that I am down, a-lying here all day, and the rent goin' on. For ever and ever, O Lord, Amen."

We allowed a little time to pass before we went in, unwilling that he should think we had

overheard that prayer. He was lying in a small dingy bed, with a medicine bottle and glass beside him on an old tin trunk. There was no fire.

He was—it seemed—better than he had been; the doctor's stuff was doing him good.

Certain arrangements were made for his benefit, and in less than three weeks he was back again at his corner.

In the spring of the following year we went abroad and were absent several months. He was no longer at his post when at last we came back, and a policeman informed us that he had not been there for some weeks. We made a second pilgrimage to his lodgings. The house had changed hands. The new landlady was a thin, anxious-looking young woman, who spoke in a thin, anxious voice. Yes, the old man had been taken very ill—double pneumonia and heart disease, she thought. Anyway, she couldn't have the worry and responsibility of him, let alone her rent. She had had the doctor, and had him taken off. Yes, it had upset him a bit; he would never have gone if he'd had his choice; but of course

she had her living to get. She had his bits of things locked up all right; he owed her a little rent. In her opinion he'd never come out again. She was very sorry for him, too, he'd given no trouble till he was took ill.

Following up her information we repaired with heavy hearts to the 'house, which he had so often declared he would never enter. Having ascertained the number of his ward we mounted the beautifully clean stairs. In the fifth of a row of beds, our old friend was lying, apparently asleep. But watching him carefully, we saw that his lips, deep sunk between his frosty moustache and beard, were continually moving.

"He's not asleep," said the nurse; "he'll lie like that all the time. He frets."

At the sound of his name, he had opened his eyes, which, though paler and smaller and more rheumy, were still almost bright. He fixed them on us with a peculiar stare, as much as to say: "You've taken an advantage of me, finding me here." We could hardly bear that look, and hurriedly asked him how he was. He tried to raise himself and answered huskily

that he was better than he had been. We begged him not to exert himself, and told him how it was that we had been away, and so forth. He seemed to pay no attention, but suddenly said: "I'm in here; I don't mean to stay, I'll be goin' out in a day or two." We tried to confirm that theory, but the expression of his eyes seemed to take away our power of comfort, and make us ashamed of looking at him. He beckoned us closer.

"If I'd a had the use of my legs," he whispered, "they'd never have had me. I'd a-gone in the river first. But I don't mean to stay—I'm goin' back home."

The nurse told us, however, that this was out of the question; he was still very ill.

Four days later we went again to see him. He was no longer there. He had gone home. They had buried him that morning.

1910.

THE JAPANESE QUINCE

AS Mr. Nilson, well known in the City, opened the window of his dressing-room on Campden Hill, he experienced a peculiar sweetish sensation in the back of his throat, and a feeling of emptiness just under his fifth rib. Hooking the window back, he noticed that a little tree in the Square Gardens had come out in blossom, and that the thermometer stood at sixty. "Perfect morning," he thought; "Spring at last!"

Resuming some meditations on the price of Tintos, hè took up an ivory-backed hand-glass and scrutinised his face. His firm, well-coloured cheeks, with their neat brown moustaches, and his round, well-opened, clear grey eyes, wore a reassuring appearance of good health. Putting on his black frock coat, he went downstairs.

In the dining-room his morning paper was laid out on the sideboard. Mr. Nilson had

scarcely taken it in his hand when he again became aware of that queer feeling. Somewhat concerned, he went to the French window and descended the scrolled iron steps into the fresh air. A cuckoo clock struck eight.

"Half an hour to breakfast," he thought; "I'll take a turn in the Gardens."

He had them to himself, and proceeded to pace the circular path with his morning paper clasped behind him. He had scarcely made two revolutions, however, when it was borne in on him that, instead of going away in the fresh air, the feeling had increased. He drew several deep breaths, having heard deep breathing recommended by his wife's doctor; but they augmented rather than diminished the sensation—as of some sweetish liquor in course within him, together with a faint aching just above his heart. Running over what he had eaten the night before, he could recollect no unusual dish, and it occurred to him that it might possibly be some smell affecting him. But he could detect nothing except a faint sweet lemony scent, rather agreeable than otherwise, which evidently emanated from the

bushes budding in the sunshine. He was on the point of resuming his promenade, when a blackbird close by burst into song, and, looking up, Mr. Nilson saw at a distance of perhaps five yards a little tree, in the heart of whose branches the bird was perched. He stood staring curiously at this tree, recognising it for that which he had noticed from his window. It was covered with young blossoms, pink and white, and little bright green leaves both round and spikey; and on all this blossom and these leaves the sunlight glistened. Mr. Nilson smiled; the little tree was so alive and pretty! And instead of passing on, he stayed there smiling at the tree.

"Morning like this!" he thought; "and here I am the only person in the Square who has the—to come out and——!" But he had no sooner conceived this thought, than he saw quite near him a man with his hands behind him, who was also staring up and smiling at the little tree. Rather taken aback, Mr. Nilson ceased to smile, and looked furtively at the stranger. It was his next-door neighbour, Mr. Tandram, well known in the City, who

had occupied the adjoining house for some five years. Mr. Nilson perceived at once the awkwardness of his position, for, being married, they had not yet had occasion to speak to one another. Doubtful as to his proper conduct, he decided at last to murmur: "Fine morning!" and was passing on, when Mr. Tandram answered: "Beautiful, for the time of year!" Detecting a slight nervousness in his neighbour's voice, Mr. Nilson was emboldened to regard him openly. He was of about Mr. Nilson's own height, with firm, well-coloured cheeks, neat brown moustaches, and round, well-opened, clear grey eyes; and he was wearing a black frock coat. Mr. Nilson noticed that he had his morning paper clasped behind him as he looked up at the little tree. And, visited somehow by the feeling that he had been caught out, he said abruptly:

"Er—can you give me the name of that tree?"

Mr. Tandram answered:

"I was about to ask you that," and stepped towards it. Mr. Nilson also approached the tree.

"Sure to have its name on, I should think," he said.

Mr. Tandram was the first to see the little label, close to where the blackbird had been sitting. He read it out.

"Japanese quince!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Nilson, "thought so. Early flowerers."

"Very," assented Mr. Tandram, and added: "Quite a feelin' in the air to-day."

Mr. Nilson nodded.

"It was a blackbird singin'," he said.

"Blackbirds," answered Mr. Tandram, "I prefer them to thrushes myself; more body in the note." And he looked at Mr. Nilson in an almost friendly way.

"Quite," murmured Mr. Nilson. "These exotics, they don't bear fruit. Pretty blossom!" and he again glanced up at the blossom, thinking: "Nice fellow, this, I rather like him."

Mr. Tandram also gazed up at the blossom. And the little tree, as if appreciating their attention, quivered and glowed. From a distance, the blackbird gave a loud, clear call.

Mr. Nilson dropped his eyes. It struck him suddenly that Mr. Tandram looked a little foolish; and, as if he had seen himself, he said: "I must be going in. Good morning!"

A shade passed over Mr. Tandram's face, as if he, too, had suddenly noticed something about Mr. Nilson.

"Good morning," he replied, and clasping their journals to their backs they separated.

Mr. Nilson retraced his steps towards his garden window, walking slowly so as to avoid arriving at the same time as his neighbour. Having seen Mr. Tandram mount his scrolled iron steps, he ascended his own in turn. On the top step he paused.

With the slanting Spring sunlight darting and quivering into it, the Japanese quince seemed more living than a tree. The blackbird had returned to it, and was chanting out his heart.

Mr. Nilson sighed; again he felt that queer sensation, that chokey feeling in his throat.

The sound of a cough or sigh attracted his attention. There, in the shadow of his French window, stood Mr. Tandram, also looking

forth across the Gardens at the little quince tree.

Unaccountably upset, Mr. Nilson turned abruptly into the house, and opened his morning paper.

1910.

ONCE MORE

AWAKENED by the tiny kicks of her baby, she straightened his limbs on her breast, and lay staring up at the dirty ceiling. The first light of the March morning, through a window which had but a ragged piece of muslin over the lower half, spread its pale glimmer in the little room. It was, like all the little back rooms of that street, deserted by Hope; neither was there anything in it of beauty or of value except the remains of her stock of violets in the round brown-wicker basket.

Soothed by the warmth of her chest and arms the baby was sleeping again, with his down-covered tiny head snuggled into the hollow of her neck; and, just above that head, the mother's face was like that of a little sphynx.

Two days before, her husband had left her, saying that he was not coming back, but this

had not dismayed her, for with the strange wisdom of those who begin to suffer young, she had long ago measured her chances with and without him. She made more than he did in their profession of flower-selling, because sometimes a "toff" gave her a fancy price, touched perhaps by the sight of her tired, pretty face, and young figure bent sideways by the weight of her baby. Yes, he took more money off her than she did off him; besides, he had left her twice before in the same way, and twice come back. The feeling in her heart was due to another discovery. Last evening, going home dead-tired, she had seen him on an omnibus with his arm round a woman's waist. At that sight a flame had leaped up in her; burdened with baby and basket, she had run after the 'bus; but it went too fast for her, she was soon left behind. And long, huddled over her fire, she had sat, seeing him with that other woman. And when the fire went out, getting into bed, had lain sleepless, still seeing, and hearing, and shivering with the cold. So, that was where he went! Was she going to put up with it any more? Thus she lay brooding, avoiding

all extravagance, matter-of-fact, sphynx-like, even in thought.

The room grew light; she got up, went to the little cracked mirror, and looked long at her face. If she had ever known that she was pretty, the life she led with her boy-husband, sometimes ill-treated, always scantily clothed, and more or less in want, had bereft her of this knowledge. The woman round whose waist she had seen his arm looked well-fed and had feathers in her hat. And in that mirror she tried desperately to find something which might weigh against those full cheeks and those feathers. But she seemed to herself all eyes, there was no colour in her cheeks; she seemed sad to herself. Turning from that glass of little comfort, she lit the fire, and taking up her baby, sat down to feed it. With her bare feet to the flame, and feeling the movement of the baby's lips against her, she had the first sensation of warmth since the omnibus had passed her. To her, striving so hard but so unconsciously for any thought that would assuage her jealousy, there came a recollection that was almost pleasant. Last evening a

"toff," entering his garden gate, had bought from her a single bunch of violets for half-a-crown. Why had he smiled, and given her that half-crown? With each tug of the baby's lips, the sensation of warmth grew, and with it began to be mingled a feeling of excitement. He would not have looked at her so long, would not have smiled—unless he had thought her pretty! But suddenly the baby's lips ceased to move; the feeling of excitement died. Wrapping the little thing in her shawl, she laid him back on the bed; then, heating a little water, began to wash with unwonted care. She had a passionate desire to make herself finer than that woman with feathers in her hat. No "toff" would have smiled at *her*, even though she had not had to pawn her clothes. Her little brain, frozen with brooding, flaming with jealousy, ran riot amongst clothes. There hung on two nails driven into the wall—all her wardrobe—a ragged skirt, torn jersey, and black straw hat. She put on her one undergarment, and went up to them. Looking at those dim clothes, she was vaguely conscious of the irony in things. Three weeks ago she

had "put away" her best suit for four shillings and sixpence, to renew her husband's stock of flowers, which rain had ruined. She had pawned her attractions to give him the chance to go after that woman! From the secret place where she kept her wealth, from those many pawn-tickets, she selected one, and put it between her teeth; then, from a broken cup, where, under a ragged cloth, she stored her money, she took the "toff's" half-crown, and five pennies. It was all she had, and the week's rent was owing. She looked round the room; her blankets were in pawn; there was nothing left except her shawl. It was a thick shawl, good for eighteen-pence. With interest threepence, she would still need four-pence to redeem her suit. She went to her flower-basket and lifted the piece of dirty sacking. The bunches were withered. In her rage and disturbance overnight she had forgotten to damp them. She sat down on her bed, and for full quarter of an hour stayed there unmoving, more like a little sphynx than ever, with her short, ivory-coloured face, black eyes, straight brows and closed red lips. Sud-

denly she got up; took off her undergarment and examined it. There were no holes! Wrapping it tightly in her shawl, she put on skirt and jersey, pinned her hat to her black hair, took pawn-ticket and her money, and went down the dirty stairs, out into the cold.

She made her way to the small shop which was the centre of her universe. No one was there, for the door had only just been opened; and she waited, stolid, amongst those innumerable goods, each one of which had been brought there wrapped in the stuff of human life. The proprietor caught sight of her presently through the glass of the inner door. He was a dark, strong man, and his quick eye, which had in it a sort of cringing hardness, instantly marked her shawl.

"I've had that before, I think, eighteenpence, ain't it?" From its recesses he took the undergarment. He looked at this critically; it was very plain, thick, and had no frills, but it was strangely new. "Sixpence on that, 'alfpenny off for the washing." Then, as if something in the nature of this transaction had moved him, he added: "Let you off the

washing." She silently held out to him her small rough hand, with her money and the pawn-ticket. He scrutinised both, and said: "I see; that'll be tuppence I owe you on the deal."

With the twopence and her suit, she journeyed home. She put on the suit over her skirt and jersey, for the sake of the warmth, and because that woman had full cheeks; stood for some minutes smoothing her hair and rubbing her face, goose-fleshed with the cold; then, leaving her baby with the woman on the ground floor, she went out towards the road where the omnibus had passed. Her heart was dry with longing to meet that woman; to be avenged on her, and *him*. All the morning she walked up and down. Now and again a youth stopped her, and tried to enter into conversation; but he soon desisted, as if something in her face had withered his good intentions. With the twopence she bought a sausage-roll, ate it, went home, fed her baby, and again came out. It was now afternoon, but she still wandered up and down, always driven on by that longing; and every

now and then smiling up at some man. What she thought to gain by these smiles cannot be told, for no one could have answered them, so mirthless were they; and yet they gave her a queer dead pleasure, as if she felt that they ministered to her vengeance. A strong wind drove the clouds over a clear blue sky, and in this wind the buds and few crocuses in the gardens were trembling. In some of the Squares, too, pigeons were cooing; and all the people seemed hurrying with happiness. But for that young wife, for ever walking and loitering down the long road where the omnibus had passed, Spring travelled the air in vain.

At five o'clock, moved by yet another obscure impulse of her longing for revenge, she branched off her beat to the white house where she had seen the "toff" enter last evening. She hesitated long before ringing the bell, and then very stolidly asked to see "the gentleman," in a voice a little thick and hoarse from the many colds she caught selling her flowers. While the maid went to see if this were possible, she waited in the hall. There

was a mirror there; but she did not look at herself, standing quite still with her eyes fixed on the ground.

She was shown into a room, lighter, warmer, more strange than any room she had ever been in; giving her a feeling as though a plateful of Christmas pudding, soft, dark, and rich, had been placed before her. The walls were white and the woodwork white, and there were brown velvet curtains, and gold frames round the pictures.

She went in smiling, as at the men in the street. But the smile faded from her lips at once. On a sofa was a lady in a white dress; and she wished to turn and go away, for she felt at once that they must know she had no undergarment beneath her new suit. The gentleman asked her to sit down. She sat down, therefore; and in answer to questions, told them that her stock was spoiled, that she owed a week's rent, that her husband had left her and the baby! But even while speaking, she felt that this was not what she had come to say. They seemed to ask the questions over and over again, as if they did not understand

her. And she told them suddenly that her husband had gone with another woman. When she said that, the lady made soft sounds, as if she understood and was sorry. She recounted then how she had seen them pass her on the omnibus; and noticed what pretty small ears the lady had. The gentleman was afraid he did not know what could be done for her: Did she wish to leave her husband? She answered quickly: "I couldn't stay with him now, of course." And the lady murmured: "No, no; of course not." What then—the gentleman said—did she propose to do? She remained silent, staring at the carpet. It seemed to her suddenly that they were thinking: "She's come for money." The gentleman took out a sovereign, and said: "Will that be any good to you?" She made a little bob, and took the sovereign, clutching it very tight. It seemed to her that they wanted her to go away. She got up, therefore, and went to the door. The gentleman went with her; and as he opened the front door he smiled. She did not smile back, for she saw that he had only meant to be kind, yesterday. And

this hurt her, as if suddenly there had slipped away from her part of her revenge.

She went home, still clutching the unchanged sovereign; so weak and faint that she could hardly feed her baby. She made up her fire and sat down beside it. It was past six, and nearly dark. Twice before, he had come back on the third day, about this time. If he were to come back now!

She crouched nearer to the fire. It grew quite dark. She looked at her baby; he was asleep, with his tiny fists crumpled against his cheeks. She made up the fire, and went back to her beat along the road where the omnibus had passed.

Two or three men stopped her, but she no longer smiled at them, and they soon sheered off. It was very clear, very cold; but she did not feel the cold. Her eyes were fastened on those great vans of warmth, the motor omnibuses. Long before each had borne its burden close, her eyes had begun searching. Long after they had rumbled by, her gaze followed them from under the brim of her black straw hat. But that for which she was

looking never appeared. In the midst of the roar and the sudden hushes, of the stir and confusion of lamplight and shadow, the stir and confusion and blackness in her own heart, she thought of her baby, and hurried away. He was still sleeping, the fire still alight. Without undressing, she crept into bed, exhausted. If she was like a little sphynx awake, she was more so than ever under the mystery of sleep, with her black lashes resting on her cheeks, and her lips just parted. In her dreams she twisted her hands and moaned. She woke at midnight.

By the light of the still live fire she saw her husband moving past the foot of the bed. He neither spoke, nor looked at her, but sat down before the fire, and began to take off his boots. The sight of that domestic act roused her to fury. So he could come in when he liked—after going where he had gone, after being what he had been, the——! But no fierce sound came; she could form no word bad enough to call him by. After three days—after what she had seen—after all her waiting—and walking—and suffering—taking off his

boots! Stealthily she raised herself in bed, the better to watch that act. If she had opened her mouth it would have been to utter a scream; no lesser cry could have relieved her heart. And still he neither spoke nor looked at her. She saw him slide down off the wooden chair, as if he would creep right into the fire. And she thought: Let him burn, the——! A vile word clung in her brain and would not come forth. She could just see his figure hunched now all in a heap, she could hear his teeth chattering, and the sound gave her pleasure. Then he was quite silent, and she, too, held her breath. Was he asleep? The thought of this sleep, while she lay there consumed with rage, was too much for her. She uttered a little furious sound. He did not look up, but his foot moved, and a loosened cinder fell; there was again silence. She began creeping to the foot of the bed. Crouching there, with loins curved, and her face bent down between her stretched-out arms, she was close above his huddled figure; so close that with her hands she could have seized and twisted back his head. In fancy she was already doing this,

putting her eyes close to his, setting her teeth in his forehead—so vividly that she had the taste of blood in her mouth. Suddenly she recoiled, burying her face between her arms, on the ragged bed coverlet. For some minutes she stayed thus, crouched like a wild cat on a branch. There was a dreadful sore feeling within her. She was thinking of the first night they had come home to that room; she was remembering his kisses. Something clicked in her throat. She no longer wished to tear and bite, and she raised her face. He had not stirred. She could just see the outline of his cheek and chin; beardless, of a boy, utterly still, as if dead. She felt cold, and afraid. What was this silence? She could not even hear him breathe. She slid down on the floor. His eyes were open, very colourless, staring at the dying fire; his cheeks were hollow, his lips seemed to have no blood in them. But they moved, shivering desperately. So he was not dead! Only frozen and starved as he had been when he came back to her those two other times. The mask of her face let nothing be seen of her thoughts and feelings,

but her teeth bit into her lower lip. So this was how he had come back to her once more!

The last of the fuel in the grate suddenly flickered into flame. He turned his head towards her. By the light of that feeble fire his eyes were like the eyes of her baby; they seemed to ask her for something; they looked so helpless; all his shuddering form seemed helpless. He muttered something; but his shivering choked the words, so that all that came to her was a sound such as her baby made. And at that sound something in her heart gave way; she pulled his head down on her breast, and with all her strength clutched him to her. And as the fire died, she still held him there, rocking him and sobbing, and once more trying to give him of the warmth of her little body.

1910.

DELIGHT

I WAS taken by a friend one afternoon to a theatre. When the curtain was raised, the stage was perfectly empty save for tall grey curtains which enclosed it on all sides, and presently through the thick folds of those curtains children came dancing in, singly, or in pairs, till a whole troop of ten or twelve were assembled. They were all girls; none, I think, more than fourteen years old, one or two certainly not more than eight. They wore but little clothing, their legs, feet and arms being quite bare. Their hair, too, was unbound; and their faces, grave and smiling, were so utterly dear and joyful, that in looking on them one felt transported to some Garden of Hesperides, where self was not, and the spirit floated in pure ether. Some of these children were fair and rounded, others dark and elf-like; but one and all looked entirely happy, and quite unself-conscious, giving no impression

of artifice, though they had evidently had the highest and most careful training. Each flight and whirling movement seemed conceived there and then out of the joy of being—dancing had surely never been a labour to them, either in rehearsal or performance. There was no tiptoeing and posturing, no hopeless muscular achievement; all was rhythm, music, light, air, and above all things, happiness. Smiles and love had gone to the fashioning of their performance; and smiles and love shone from every one of their faces and from the clever white turnings of their limbs.

Amongst them—though all were delightful—there were two who especially riveted my attention. The first of these two was the tallest of all the children, a dark thin girl, in whose every expression and movement there was a kind of grave, fiery love.

During one of the many dances, it fell to her to be the pursuer of a fair child, whose movements had a very strange soft charm; and this chase, which was like the hovering of a dragon-fly round some water-lily, or the wooing of a moonbeam by the June night, had in

it a most magical sweet passion. That dark, tender huntress, so full of fire and yearning, had the queerest power of symbolising all longing, and moving one's heart. In her, pursuing her white love with such wistful fervour, and ever arrested at the very moment of conquest, one seemed to see the great secret force that hunts through the world, on and on, tragically unresting, immortally sweet.

The other child who particularly enchanted me was the smallest but one, a brown-haired fairy crowned with a half-moon of white flowers, who wore a scanty little rose-petal-coloured shift that floated about her in the most delightful fashion. She danced as never child danced. Every inch of her small head and body was full of the sacred fire of motion; and in her little *pas seul* she seemed to be the very spirit of movement. One felt that Joy had flown down, and was inhabiting there; one heard the rippling of Joy's laughter. And, indeed, through all the theatre had risen a rustling and whispering; and sudden bursts of laughing rapture.

I looked at my friend; he was trying stealth-

ily to remove something from his eyes with a finger. And to myself the stage seemed very misty, and all things in the world lovable; as though that dancing fairy had touched them with tender fire, and made them golden.

God knows where she got that power of bringing joy to our dry hearts: God knows how long she will keep it! But that little flying Love had in her the quality that lies in deep colour, in music, in the wind, and the sun, and in certain great works of art—the power to set the heart free from every barrier, and flood it with delight.

1910.

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